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IN LOVE AND WAR.

“There was a May, and a weel-far’d May,
Lived high up in yon glen;
Her name was Katherine Janfarie,
She was courted by mony men.”

The Ballad of Katherine Janfarie.

IN LOVE AND WAR.

A Romance.

BY

CHARLES GIBBON,

AUTHOR OF "IN HONOUR BOUND," "ROBIN GRAY,"
"WHAT WILL THE WORLD SAY?" "FOR LACK OF GOLD," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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IN LOVE AND WAR.

CHAPTER I.

THE SPY.

“But she has stown the King’s redding kaim,
Likewise the Queen her wedding knife,
And sent the tokens to Carmichael,
To cause young Logie get his life.

“She sent him a purse o’ the red gowd,
Another o’ the white monie;
She sent him a pistol for each hand,
And bade him shoot when he gat free.”

The Laird of Logie.

THE passage conducted straight
into a ward-room where the
sentinels were always to be
found on duty with several of their com-

rades who were off duty, and who were either waiting to take their turn on guard, and beguiling themselves with some game at hazard meanwhile, or who came there to spend an idle hour.

There was no other way of ingress to the dungeons or egress from them save by this ward-room, and therefore it was unnecessary for the sentinel to remain in the passage—for no prisoner could escape, even if he managed to open his dungeon door, unless he passed through the midst of the soldiers.

The escaping prisoner and his guide halted on the threshold of the ward-room.

Katherine drew breath, closing her lips firmly to hide their tremor, whilst she strove to nerve herself for the crisis which was at hand. She touched Gordon's arm as if to convey a tender reassurance.

“Remember—be silent, no matter what is said or done,” she whispered.

He was as coldly unmoved as if he had been the least interested of all persons in the world in the present peril.

“I will remember,” he said.

On that she boldly led him into the ward-room.

The sentinel confronted her, and the butt of his halberd rang on the stone floor as he brought it down from his shoulder into the position of rest.

He was a grim-visaged fellow, with a scar dividing his nose, from the brows downward, and scars on his cheeks, showing that he had been in action of some sort.

Behind were half a dozen troopers; four of them at a table playing dice with much loud laughter and constant sallies of wit—or, at any rate, of what was wit to them, and is to all of us, the difference lying only

in expression ; for their theme was war and love-making. Two of these rough convivials looked on at their comrade's play, joined in the mirth, and all made frequent application to the black jack, which passed from hand to hand almost as rapidly as the dice-box.

Lounging against the wall, close to the wide door which opened upon the corridor, was Ross, the sly old servitor who was the faithful adherent of Cochrane, and the uncle of the girl Mysie, who, without knowing it, had rendered such kindly office to Katherine when she had been entrapped in the minion's apartments.

Ross was a shrewd fellow, who saw everything and said nothing. His master had directed him to keep a sharp eye on Lady Cochrane—as he persisted in designating Katherine.

Ross pocketed the two golden angels

which had been placed in his hand as the order was spoken in his ear. He knew that the gold pieces were only an instalment of what he might hope to get by-and-by; and so as they clinked in his pouch he pledged himself as the spy of the man in power.

He kept his pledge, and Katherine—not wholly unaware of the constant watch upon her—was scarcely at any moment beyond this man's vision, save when she was in the chambers of the Queen.

When she had asked for Captain Murray, and when he had conducted her to Lamington's cell, Ross had followed as far as the ward-room. There he had stopped, for he feared to expose his purpose by advancing too far; and he knew with what contempt the men of swords and halberds would have regarded him had he been denounced as a spy. They were rough fellows, and

they would have in all probability displayed their contempt in some fashion more forcible than looks or words.

He invented the excuse that he had come to have a gossip with the troopers, and to replenish their black-jack when it was empty. On these terms he was made welcome.

So he waited and watched. He was puzzled when Captain Murray returned without the lady, and passed through the room giving no instructions of any kind.

He was still more puzzled when the lady reappeared with a cloaked figure behind her.

A burst of laughter, in the midst of which the sentinel called :

“Halt !”

Katherine with a cool courage that surprised herself, looked in the man's grim face, and smiled sweetly.

It is impossible for a warrior—or a man of any heart—to look in a pretty woman's face, to see it smiling sweetly on him, and remain stern.

The soldier unbended visibly, grim as he was in feature.

“Why do you stay us, good sir?” she said softly.

“Duty, lady; I must have authority for permitting you to pass hence.”

“Why, you saw me enter!” she exclaimed, with very pretty surprise, and a coaxing glance of the bright eyes.

“Ay, but not your companion.”

“Has not the captain told you there were two of us to pass?”

“Not a word, said he, lady, else I would not dare to bar your way, unless it might be to have a minute's pleasure in looking at you.”

Ross bent down to the men at the table

who were too busily occupied to notice what was passing behind them.

“Yonder’s a rare lass,” he said, with a wicked grin; and she is up to some mischief with our comrade. Look to it.”

“Did you ever see a pretty woman that wasn’t up to mischief?” retorted the man nearest the speaker; and then he laughed so loud and heartily at his own humour that the others could not help joining him.

But they all looked round at Katherine and stared at her in a fashion that would have been unendurably offensive to her if she had only had time to observe it. Lamington observed and almost forgot his promise to be silent and quiet in his desire to bring them to a proper sense of respect.

“What an eye she has,” said one.

“And what lips,” said another.

“Take care,” said a third; “it is the new dame of her Majesty the Queen. I

saw her in attendance this morning. So take care of your tongues, my masters, or you may chance to get them clipped."

The warning had its effect, and the gaze of free admiration promptly changed to one of respect. They were even about to resume their game and leave the lady as one whom they had no right to incommode by their observation, when Ross spoke again :

"There is mischief, masters, I tell you ; so look to it, and do not let them pass till I return, or you will answer for it to my Lord Cochrane."

He departed hastily.

Meanwhile the conversation between Katherine and the sentinel proceeded.

"Well, she said, laughing good-naturedly, and quite captivating the poor fellow to the destruction of all caution, "you have had several minutes of the pleasure you seem

to covet ; so now you will let us go on our way."

"I dare not, lady, without some warrant."

"Will this satisfy you?"

And she held up her pretty hand to show him the king's signet.

The man took down a lantern from its iron hook ; and taking her hand in his own horny fist examined the ring.

"Do you not know it?" she said with just the least perceptible impatience.

"It bears his Majesty's crest," answered the sentinel, slowly.

"It is your King's signet," she said with a tone of proud complacency.

The man shouldered his halberd, and made a respectful salute.

"I ask your pardon, lady, for staying you ; but my commands are strict."

He stepped aside.

“You are blameless,” she said, with a gracious smile, as she passed him.

She advanced to the door, which was now the only obstacle between her and the comparative freedom of her companion. He walked by her side.

But they were brought to a sudden halt. The six troopers, who had been a moment before busy with their dice and ale, now stood on guard at the entrance with their halberds in rest.

The name of Cochrane was not a popular one even amongst these men, but it was one they feared; and the intimation that they would have to answer to him, if the two persons before them escaped, instantly cleared their brains of whatever dulness the fumes of the liquor they had been quaffing might have produced. They sprang to their feet, seized their weapons, and stood on guard.

“Pardon, my lady,” said the soldier, who had recognized Katherine as one of the Queen’s ladies, “but you cannot pass.”

“How, fellow?” exclaimed Gordon, unable to restrain himself.

She grasped his arm and pressed it convulsively to remind him of his promise.

His indignation and her anxious movement were observed by the soldiers, and held as confirmation of the suspicion which Ross had awakened that there was some treachery afoot.

“By whose orders do you detain us?” she said, boldly, although her heart was quaking.

“We hope you will not blame us, lady, but you must remain here for a few minutes until we are relieved from the awkward duty that has been forced on us.”

“What awkward duty, and by whom is it forced upon you?” she rejoined, still maintaining her haughty bearing.

The sentinel, who had been the first to stay them, approached at this juncture to aid them.

“There’s a mistake, comrade; you must not stop her ladyship.”

“It’s not so much the lady as the gentleman who is with her that must be stopped,” said the soldier. “Has she shown you a warrant to permit them to pass, comrade?”

“The lady has shown me the signet of his Majesty the King, and after that I had no business to ask who or what the gallant is who goes with her,” answered the sentinel, with the tone of one whose discretion has been unfairly questioned.

“Will you show it to me, my lady?” said the spokesman of the guard, who with his comrades began to feel somewhat uneasy at the announcement of the authority which had overcome the sentinel’s opposition.

“It is there!”

She held it up to him and the soldier saluted, hesitated, and said :

“We have been told that we will be answerable to Sir Robert Cochrane for the detention of your ladyship and this gentleman who keeps himself so closely hidden from us.”

The pulse of the man and woman seemed to suspend their action at this information.

Katherine recovered quickly.

“Master soldier, you will be answerable to the King himself if you set the authority of his servant before his own.”

The men were staggered. She seized the moment of hesitation and said authoritatively :

“Stand aside, sirs.”

Her dignity and imperative tone made the desired impression. The men wavered,

looked stupidly from one to another, and finally stepped back from the entrance.

The way was clear now. No, fortune was in one of her coquetting moods, and was alternately raising and dashing the hopes of Gordon and his brave champion.

“Here is the captain,” cried one of the soldiers, with much satisfaction in the prospect of entire relief from all responsibility in this peculiar business, which seemed to threaten them with dire penalties whichever way they acted.

On the one side was the authority of the tyrant they feared, and on the other appeared the authority of the King, whom they were bound to honour and obey before all others. So the entrance of Captain Murray was a source of congratulation to the soldiers, although it was the source of another and more serious check

than any previous one to those who were eager to escape from the place.

The woman's wit was sharpened by the necessities of the occasion. She acted as if by inspiration. Before the soldiers had time to say a word, she advanced straight to the captain.

"This is the King's signet, Captain Murray," she said, showing it; "on the authority of this you gave me admission to this place; on the same authority I require you to permit me and my friend to pass freely hence. We are going to the presence chamber of her Majesty the Queen; and you may follow us thither if it so please you."

There was an eager flush upon her face, and yet a certain degree of impatient disdain, at the interferences which had arisen, and these combined to make her look more lovely than ever.

The captain was sensible of her beauty. He was, besides, as has already appeared, we hope, a gentleman in every respect, and one kindly disposed towards Lamington. But he was also an officer, stern in his regard for duty. He maintained the strictest discipline amongst those who were under his command, and he was careful to observe the same rectitude in his own conduct which he required from others.

He glanced from his fair challenger to the cloaked figure at her side; and despite the disguise, aided by his knowledge of circumstances, he recognized Gordon.

His eyes opened, and his lips closed tight and hard, whilst his brows contracted.

Katherine perceived the rapid change of countenance, and her heart sank within her. It seemed so hard to be so near the accomplishment of her object and then to fail.

“This is undoubtedly an authority, madam,” he said, coldly, “which I would be the last to oppose, but——”

He was interrupted by the heavy tramp of feet on the corridor, and the entrance of a dozen armed men who wore the livery of Sir Robert Cochrane.

At sight of them, Lamington drew back a pace, and clutched desperately at his side where his sword should have been. Then he became suddenly calm, for he noticed the trooper who had been the unlucky cause of their delay, and the consequent failure of their project, holding his halberd carelessly on his shoulder. When the moment for action came he would seize that weapon, and woe to those who attempted to bar his way when armed, and conscious that he fought against the myrmidons of his deadliest foe, and the man who sought to become his assassin.

At the sight of the men Katherine barely restrained a scream, and for an instant she felt that her enterprise was frustrated. She recovered, however, and in very desperation maintained a calm demeanour.

At sight of the men Captain Murray's countenance changed again. The stern expression which it had assumed in the moment when he had felt himself compelled to discharge an important and painful duty, became transformed into an expression of disgust.

Behind Cochrane's men, and keeping purposely in the background, was Ross the spy. At the head of them was Torphichen, the fat little master of fence and terpsichore. This personage advanced to Captain Murray and presented a sealed packet.

"I am directed to relieve you, sir, of the

care of your prisoner, Gordon of Lamington, and this is my warrant," he said, with a salute which displayed all the stereotyped courtesy of the dancing-master.

The captain slowly, and with apparent reluctance, took the packet. But before he broke the seal he glanced at Katherine.

There was a deadly pallor on her face, and she answered his look with one so full of agonized appeal that he paused in the act which would have compelled him at once to deliver Lamington into the hands of his enemy.

She stretched out her hand imploringly.

"That is the King's signet," she said, in a low, tremulous voice.

There was the hesitation of a second in the captain's manner. Then he raised his hat, and bowed with respectful courtesy.

"Pardon me, madam," he said, kindly, and with a slight huskiness of tone.

“Pardon me, I had forgotten that I must obey the sign of his Majesty’s authority before attending to any other duty, even if it were not a lady who presented it. Most honourable Master Torphichen, permit this lady and her escort to pass.”

Torphichen, not to be outdone in politeness, made a profound reverence to the dame, and bade his followers stand aside.

The captain respectfully took her hand and led her through the midst of the men, passing by Ross, who stood puzzled and silent, and out to the corridor, Lamington following.

“Heaven bless you, sir,” she said, pressing his hand in earnest gratitude, as he was about to part from her.

“Saints forgive me,” he muttered in a low tone, and retreated thoughtfully.

Her distress, and the appearance of the

royal favourite's myrmidons with the warrant which was too surely the sign of doom for the unfortunate prisoner, had effected the triumph of the worthy captain's good nature over his scrupulous sense of duty. The beauty and sorrow of the lady and the malice of her persecutor, had made him do that which no bribe or prospect of personal advantage could have tempted him to do. He was aware that he would probably have to answer for his offence to a severe task-master; but that did not disturb him so much as the thought that he had planted a bar sinister on the hitherto unstained shield of his fidelity to whatever trust was imposed on him.

“But it cannot be an unpardonable sin,” he reflected uneasily, “to help the unfortunate against the persecution of a knave. Holy Mother, help me. I must take the consequences now.”

Katherine and her companion hurried along the corridors in the direction of the Queen's apartments; but that was not their destination.

Ross, perplexed and curious, sneaked after them, keeping at a safe distance, however.





CHAPTER II.

“FOLLOW, FOLLOW!”

“When Carmichael came before the King
He fell low down upon his knee;
The very first word that the King spake,
Was, ‘Where’s the Laird of young Logie?’”
The Laird of Logie.

THE captain rejoined Torphichen.
The latter received him with
a leer.

“Do you know the dame you have just
been gallanting?” said he, looking very
sly.

“Well, slightly,” answered Murray, with
assumed indifference and real discomfort;
“she is one of the Queen’s damsels.”

“Ay, ay, but she is more than that.”

“Indeed?”

“I believe she is the only creature on the earth our friend Cochrane ever cared for without calculating the precise value of the person to himself in the shape of coin or place.”

“Faith, she is a fair-looking dame,” answered the captain, relieved; “but I doubt if her fancy tends his way.”

“Therein is the jest. It is said that she is even wed to him by holy church, and still turns her back on him. Wherefore, as the rule runs, her coldness makes him blaze the more, and he is as hot in the pursuit of her as he has ever been in the compassing of weightier affairs.”

“It would be a pity if she yielded to him.”

“How so? She might do worse. He has chances that few men have.”

“True, true; she might do worse; but her influence might interfere with his projects.”

“Hum—perhaps. Who was it went with her but now?”

“An escort, as I understand.” The captain again became uncomfortable. “Some one of her Majesty’s followers, I suspect, sent hither to protect her from any chance rudeness on the part of my lads, who are ever too quick, as you know, to forget their manners in their admiration of a bright eye. You know something of that humour—eh, comrade? Ha, ha! I have heard of many a poor lass who has lost appetite for your sake.”

“Well, a man of spirit must be gallant at times—it’s his nature,” answered the fat little fellow, with much complacency, for he cultivated the repute of being a cavalier in Cupid’s ranks; “and I confess that there

may have been some passages in my life that have left broken hearts as well as broken heads behind them. But a man cannot marry every dame who chooses to set her heart upon him.”

“Had it been possible, I’ll be sworn you would have had a hundred wives, Master Torphichen,” commented Murray, laughing with apparent zest in admiration of his gossip, and all the while congratulating himself that this banter was giving the fugitive time to make good his escape.

Having once commenced anything, Captain Murray was not one to leave it half accomplished.

Torphichen, the obese, was flattered by this admiration, and laughed at the boast of his gallantry all the more loudly and gleefully because he had been really the least successful of wooers, and the lie gave him a species of revenge that gratified his

vanity in blemishing the reputation of the sex with the same breath that extolled himself.

“Well, well,” he said, leering again, and remembering the object for which he had come hither, “we shall have a gossip, captain, anent these affairs when we have more leisure. You have not broken the seal of my warrant yet.”

“Ah, that was a neglect; but is there need for so much haste? I have some rare sack and Burgundy in my chamber that you should know the flavour of. What say you?”

“In faith I like your offer better than the service I am bound on. Yet there is no such need for haste, either. I can travel an hour later as well as an hour earlier, and in the better humour for your hospitality.”

“Come, then. A cup before you go

will give you stomach for the keen night air.”

The master of fence was not proof against this warm invitation. He left his men to await him in the ward-room, and accompanied the captain to his retreat, where the wine proved even more attractive than the entertainer had promised.

He would not have consented so readily to accept this hospitality had he suspected that Katherine's companion was the person whom his warrant authorized him to conduct as a prisoner from the dungeon of the palace to the keep of Cochrane's Tower. Ross had only directed his suspicion to the lady; and that, the King's signet and the conduct of Captain Murray had removed.

The wine was good; Torphichen forgot his mission, and the warrant still remained unopened. But the conviviality of the captain and his guest was abruptly checked

by the appearance of Cochrane, to whom Ross had hastened as soon as he became satisfied that the purpose of Mistress Katherine was not to conduct her companion to the presence of the Queen, but to enable him to quit the palace unobserved. He was then certain that this was an affair for the immediate attention of his master, and so it proved.

Torphichen looked up at the scowling visage of his principal in happy unconsciousness of any dereliction, save in the matter of half an hour's delay, which was of no consequence.

Murray flushed slightly, and then assumed an expression that was almost dogged in its resolution to maintain silence.

"I required you to make speed, Torphichen," said Cochrane, darkly, "and this seems a droll fashion of obedience."

"Swords and daggers, man," cried the

impetuous little master, his good humour changing on the instant to rage, “am I your cur that I must do your dirty work and be whipped for it by you? ’Sblood, sir, I but stayed to drain a cup of good fellowship with my comrade here in order to give me spirit for the knave’s task you set me: and forsooth, because I tarry so long as a man may drink in comfort, you turn upon me. There, take your warrant, and do the thing yourself.”

This ebullition was the result of the wine that was in the man’s stomach, rather than the judgment that was in his head; for although somewhat of a blusterer at all times, he was usually careful to avoid giving offence to Cochrane. But the pique with which he saw him elevated to the first place in the King’s favour found vent in this moment of tyrannical oppression, for such he considered the attack of Cochrane.

The latter picked up the warrant which was flung at him by his hot-headed compeer, and noting that the seal was unbroken, his scowl became darker. Without a word he turned to Murray.

“This is for you, sir. Has it not been presented before?”

“It was, and I am to blame, perhaps, for not examining it sooner. But the matter did not seem of pressing import, and I laid it on the table there whilst I helped my guest to prepare for his journey.”

“You have helped him to drown what little wit he had. Read now.”

Torphichen swaggered up to his compeer.

“Much or little wit, Cochrane, I stand slight from no man. You will see to this business yourself, and I thank the saints my hands are clear of it.”

“Tush!” ejaculated Cochrane, with the

gesture of impatience he might have used had a child stumbled in his way at a busy moment.

“This way, gentlemen,” said Murray, quietly, after reading the warrant.

The fencing master sullenly reseated himself at the table. Cochrane followed the captain.

They went to the dungeon in which Lamington had been confined, and found it unoccupied.

“You shall answer for this with your head, Captain Murray,” cried Cochrane, in savage chagrin.

“I shall answer to my master, sir, in whatever he may require of me,” answered the soldier, with dignity.

The royal favourite turned from him exasperated but not foiled yet. He addressed his own retainers.

“Pass the word to the sentinels—a

prisoner has escaped. Let every door and gate be closed, and let none pass without permission given under my hand or the King's. The rest of you call upon every man in the palace to begin the search, and leave no corner, however low or high or sacred, that you do not penetrate."

He wheeled round to Murray.

"You, sir, will call the gentlemen of the guard together and inform them that you have permitted the villain who attempted the life of his Majesty to escape. Redeem your error—if it be no more than error—by prompt service now."

Murray bowed, and departed to summon the guard.

Cochrane had examined the sentinel and the men who had been in the wardroom when the prisoner passed, and although astonished to find that the King's signet had been the token which enabled him to

escape, he was satisfied that Murray had betrayed his trust, and Torphichen too.

The alarm passed from one quarter of the palace to another with the rapidity of lightning; and in ten minutes after the discovery of the escape every man and woman within the precincts of the royal dwelling was on the alert.

Cochrane himself led the search, fired by all the passions of disappointed malice, fear, and jealousy. He moved from place to place with the nimbleness of a panther—now issuing commands, now questioning those whom he encountered as to their success. He first made sure that no one had passed through the gates for two hours, and then he felt that the victim was still within reach.



CHAPTER III.

THE WATCHWORD.

“All night I’ll watch you in the park,
With me till morning stay;
For dark and dreary is the night,
And dangerous the way.

“Beneath the bush he laid him down,
And wrapped him in his plaid;
While trembling for her lover’s fate,
At distance stood the maid.”

Sir James the Rose.

PROCEEDING at a quick pace,
but not so hastily as to excite
suspicion in the minds of any
of the persons they met in the corridors,
Katherine and Lamington, without ob-

struction, reached the tower in which the Confessional was situated, and where she had first presented herself to the Queen.

There was a private corridor leading thence to the chapel; but it was guarded by a door, and when she tried it this door was fast.

She did not know how or where to procure the key; the door was too strong to be easily forced, and the poor lady turned with eyes of dismay to her lover.

He was calmer, and the emergency only made his resolution the more desperate.

“Since that way is closed,” said he quietly, “I must try the bolder course, and openly cross the square. The alarm has not been raised yet, and I may pass the guard by some lucky chance in time.”

“It is madness. You would be chal-

lenged; you have not got the word, and you would be stayed at once."

"I must venture that," he answered, "for to remain here is only to be captured, without even the poor chance of escape I may find at the gates."

Ross had got near enough to catch the last words, and thereupon he departed to find his master.

Katherine remembered Mysie Ross, and fancied that she might know where to procure the key of this obstinate door which barred them from safety.

"No, there is another hope.' Remain here."

She pointed to the embrasure of a window which was dark enough to screen him from any casual observation. There he ensconced himself whilst she hurried away in quest of Mysie.

The delay was unfortunate, for the girl

was unable to supply the required information. Katherine rejoined Gordon.

“You have failed,” he said, reading the disappointment in her face.

“Yes ; you must make the venture of crossing the square.”

They retraced their steps to the head of the principal staircase. As they approached it the alarm was given, and the pursuit commenced.

Hurrying footsteps, the murmur of voices, and the clank of arms were the sounds which suddenly greeted them, and they drew back appalled.

“It is too late,” he said ; “and I have no weapon with which to secure for myself an honourable death.”

“Too late for that course,” she said, stifling her agitation and quickly devising a new scheme, “but not too late for another. Yonder stair leads to the ram-

parts. Ascend; they may not think of searching there, and if they do, you may still find means of hiding till they retreat."

"Good—farewell. You will hear of me whether I fall or live."

"First, give me your cloak and hat—quick, they are coming."

Without questioning her purpose, he obeyed. Then touching her hand with his lips, and with one look of love and gratitude for the devotion and courage she displayed on his account, he sprang up the stairs which she had pointed out.

Cochrane a moment afterwards stood on the spot where the lovers had parted. With him were half a dozen of his followers and Ross.

They saw a figure in cloak and hat moving rapidly along the corridor.

"Yonder's the man," cried Ross, point-

ing to the figure; "I could swear to the hat and cloak."

Cochrane, with an exclamation of satisfaction in the immediate prospect of triumph, pursued.

The figure glided onward swiftly and noiselessly. The pursuer was startled and brought to an abrupt stand, when the figure boldly entered the ante-room of the Queen's apartments.

After a moment's hesitation, Cochrane rudely thrust open the door and followed.

"Her Majesty's privacy must be protected from such intrusions as this," he muttered; "and our prisoner must be seized."

He was confronted by Katherine.

Behind her stood several attendants staring with considerable amazement at the lady and at the pursuers. On the

floor at her feet lay the cloak and hat which had beguiled the enemy.

“Where is the man who entered here but now,” he demanded, fiercely.

“No man has entered here,” she replied, calmly.

“It is false. I saw him not a moment gone.”

“You were mistaken, sir. Appeal to these gentlemen if you still doubt me.”

“I have been here for the last half-hour, sir,” said one of the pages in waiting, “and during that time no stranger has entered here. But her ladyship came in just now as if she had been masquerading, and there lie the garments she has thrown off.”

Cochrane looked at the cloak and hat, and comprehended the trick which had been played him.

“Where is the knave Gordon?” he

said between his clenched teeth, and grasping her arm with a gripe that made the blood tingle at her finger tips.

“Secure from your malice,” she replied, without wincing under the pain of his gripe.

“You know, and you shall tell me where he lies hidden.”

“You cannot invent any torture which will force that from me.”

He was sure of it when he looked into her eyes, so clear, so steady, and so scornful. He released her, wheeled about, and quitted the apartment. He cursed the stupidity of Ross, but he consoled himself with the reflection that the fugitive could not be far away when such a decoy as that by which he had been deceived was necessary for his protection.

He retreated quickly, and halted at the foot of the stair which conducted to the

roof of the tower. Having explored the opposite extremity of the corridor, posting guards at every point of egress as he went along, he began to ascend to the ramparts.

The staircase was narrow and steep. Lamington had mounted it lightly, and at the top he came to a doorway which gave to the battlements of the palace. There he paused, peering forth cautiously to discover the whereabouts of the sentinel.

The night was gloomy as the fortunes of the man who gazed at it. Big heavy clouds were drifting rapidly athwart the sky, presaging another storm. Occasionally they left clear spaces of deep blue, which reflected a faint light on the earth, at other times there prevailed a darkness in which it became difficult to distinguish objects at only a few yards' distance.

Turrets and ramparts rose in shadowy

outline before him, and offered many dark corners in which he might lie concealed, if the search were not too vigilant, and the searchers were not provided with torches. But these were the very conditions upon which he could not count; and there was the pressing probability that the watch would detect him before he could reach even a temporary coign of vantage. The drifting clouds cleared a space and permitted him to see the trooper, who guarded that side of the tower, marching slowly away from him with his halberd resting on his shoulder.

Gordon's resolution was promptly taken.

With the celerity of an antelope and the caution of a man whose life is at stake, he followed the sentinel, keeping well under the shadow of the ramparts, so that even had the soldier turned unexpectedly he would not have seen him. The man did

not turn, however, and Lamington got close behind him without his presence being suspected.

Then with one bound he had his arms upon the soldier's throat, stifling the cry of alarm which the affrighted fellow tried to utter. Gordon snatched the halberd from his nerveless grasp, and with the butt end of it struck him down insensible.

This noiseless victory gave him an unpremeditated advantage. None of the other sentinels who were silently patrolling the battlements had observed any sound of the brief scuffle. But discovery was imminent whenever they happened to miss their comrade at the points where they were accustomed to meet and interchange the word of assurance that all was right.

Gordon expeditiously removed the man's steel cap, and adjusted it on his own head. Next he unbuckled the belt and removed

the jerkin; last he drew off the heavy jack boots, and assumed them himself. They fitted well enough for his purpose, and so he thrust the unconscious trooper close to the rampart, shouldered the halberd, and marched forward in time to meet the next watch.

“All goes well,” he muttered, indistinctly, in reply to the man who saluted him as his comrade.

He wheeled round, and paced slowly back, the other doing the same without heeding the churlish mood in which he had been greeted.

When Gordon halted at the head of the stair, he breathed with something of that sense of relief which one experiences in having escaped an accident, and he began to balance the probability of being able to pass the main body of the guard undetected. He could risk it if he only knew the watch-

word. But how was he to learn that? To say that he had forgotten it would attract a degree of attention which must prove fatal to him.

Meanwhile there was the danger of the sentinel whom he had overthrown recovering and giving the alarm.

His reflections were presently interrupted by the sounds of Cochrane and his followers approaching. The crisis of the adventure was at hand; success or failure would depend upon the results of the next few minutes.

“One certainty there is,” he muttered, setting his teeth; “if he recognizes me, Cochrane’s flight downward will be a swift one.”

And he cast a grim look towards the ramparts, resolved at the first movement of suspicion to hurl his foe down to the depths below. For once his own luck and that of

the royal favourite depended on the same event. If Cochrane failed to identify him his life would be saved, and Gordon would gain the knowledge of the watchword, which was essential to his escape.

Up sprang the pursuers, Cochrane first, dark and wrathful.

The false sentinel crossed the door with his halberd.

“Who goes there?” he demanded, in a hoarse, gruff voice.

“Friends.”

“The word?”

“*Hold fast for the King,*” answered Cochrane, impatiently, thrusting the sentinel aside, and stepping out on the battlement.

He unsuspectingly placed himself between the ramparts and the man whom he pursued with so much rancour.

“Now,” thought Gordon, standing within arm’s reach, “one blow from this halberd

or one touch of my hand, and you go to your long reckoning.”

The opportunity to settle old scores was indeed so favourable that it was with some difficulty he resisted the temptation to hurl the knave over the walls and take the consequences, whatever they might be. That would have been a poor as well as a mean retaliation, however, in which for an instant's agony, all his crimes would be paid in this world. That was not enough for Lamington—he had been too deeply wronged.

“Have you had any strangers with you?” queried Cochrane, hurriedly.

“None, so please you, sir, during my watch,” was the response, in the same hoarse voice as before, and with a fair assumption of the respect belonging to the character he represented.

“Have you been on guard at the door all the time?”

“No, sir, I have been patrolling between this and the north tower.”

“The knave may have crept up, then, whilst your back was turned. Advance with the torches, and search all of you.”

Cochrane set the example. Snatching a torch from the hand of one of his followers, he sped along the ramparts, thrusting the light into every dark corner, and leaving no nook in which a rat could have lain hidden uninvestigated. The men spread themselves rapidly over the battlements, and left Gordon alone.

“I have got the watchword,” he muttered, joyfully, “and it shall go hard but I will turn it to good account.”

Grasping the halberd firmly, he darted down the stairs, which seemed to have been left to his care as the sentinel.

But when he reached the foot he was suddenly arrested by a couple of stout fellows who wore the Cochrane badge.

“Where away so fast, comrade?” said one gruffly, and holding him by the arm.

One glance at them, and his scheme was formed.

“To the ramparts, comrades!—to the ramparts! It is our master’s command.”

“Has he found the prisoner, then?”

“They are close upon him. Away; why stand you questioning me? I am in haste to summon assistance.”

His haste and apparent frankness, combined with the probability of his announcement, deceived the men. They hurried up to the aid of their master.

Gordon sprang down the staircase to the corridor which gave egress to the square.

His course was arrested again, this time by a couple of troopers, and his nerves were thrilled in brief suspense lest they should discover the faults of his attire.

“To the ramparts, comrades!” he

shouted again. "I go to give the alarm."

At that instant he heard a shout far up in the tower which, to the men, confirmed his intelligence that their help was needed, but which to Lamington intimated that his stratagem had been discovered. The insensible watch had been found, his senses revived, and he had made the pursuers aware of the mishap which had befallen him.

The troopers who now stayed Gordon released him at once, and they hastened to join the other dupes whilst he dashed out to the square.

With the fleet steps of a stag in full career he crossed to the heavy archway, and there, as he had expected, the guard commanded him to halt.

"Hold fast for the King!"

"Pass on."

Next, to the warder's gate, where the same question and answer were made.

"You cannot pass the gate until we receive commands," said the warder.

"I must pass," answered Lamington with the boldness of desperation; and happily here the darkness aided his disguise, for as he was obliged to stand longer parleying with the man than he had done with any of the others, the incompleteness of his costume would have been detected had there been light. As it was, the guard only saw the steel cap, jerkin, and halberd of a trooper.

"My orders are plain, comrade, that no living creature is to pass hence till Sir Robert Cochrane himself appears at the gate or sends a warrant under his own hand or the King's."

"But I tell you, it is Sir Robert Cochrane himself who sends me hither. He

fears that the prisoner who has escaped has already made his way beyond the bounds of the palace, and I am bidden to speed to the town to raise the alarm there.”

“Have you no token?”

“What need was there for token when you see what badge I wear? But refuse, if you please. I am content to bide here—only if the knave make clear away you must answer for it to Sir Robert Cochrane.

“Nay, if such be his command you must pass,” said the man, unwilling to accept the responsibility which was thus forced upon him.

The postern was opened, the drawbridge lowered, and Lamington cleared the out-works with a dozen strides.

As the chains clanked in raising the bridge again, the fugitive heard the loud murmur of his pursuers and knew that they

were already in the court, that in a few moments more they would be rushing out upon him in full chase. The hunters were so close at hand that he was uncertain which way to fly.

He stood hesitating, listening to the threatening sounds of his enemy's approach—he was like one fascinated by the very imminence of his peril. He dared not seek hiding in the town, for there the search would be hottest, and every other direction seemed to be equal in danger.

He was still near enough to the palace to hear the harsh grating of the portcullis in its socket, as it was raised to give egress to the pursuers. Then he fled.





CHAPTER IV.

THE SLOOP "HELOISE."

"I saw the new moon late yestreen,
Wi' the old moon in her arm;
And if we gang to sea, master,
I fear we'll come to harm."

Sir Patrick Spens.

HAMINGTON made straight across fields and morass to the Forth. He procured a boat and rowed down with the tide to the Leith roadstead, where he found the French sloop *Heloise*. It was the same vessel which had brought him with the Abbot Panther from France, and by the direction of his

lordship it had remained at anchor ready to serve them in such an emergency as the present. The Abbott was already on board, and received Lamington with hearty congratulations; but he would explain nothing until the fugitive had refreshed mind and body by sleep. Gordon was conducted to a comfortable berth, where, utterly worn out by his exertions and anxiety, he soon slept soundly.

When he wakened he was at first perplexed by the discovery that the gloomy walls of his prison were transformed into a pleasant cabin. But one by one the events of the preceding day and night recurred to him until he had traced them to the moment when he had stepped on board the sloop.

His meditations were interrupted by the entrance of Panther, who, before replying to Gordon's eager questions,

desired to know how he was disposed to bear himself in the matter of the conspiracy to overthrow Cochrane.

"As the one who wishes to be entrusted with his death warrant," cried Lamington, excitedly.

The Abbot smiled with the utmost satisfaction at the warmth of his companion.

"I thought your humour would run in that direction," he said, "but remember that you are pledging yourself now to desperate measures, for nothing less can help us."

"There is no measure so desperate that I will not venture upon it, if it promise me the destruction of Robert Cochrane. I exist only for that purpose now, since this hand, stained with her brother's blood, can never clasp Katherine's as that of my wife."

His brow darkened, and his head sunk

on his breast as he reflected upon the impassable barrier which had arisen between him and the dearest hope of his existence.

“Are you sure that Janfarie is dead?” queried Panther, meditatively.

Gordon started at this expression of a doubt, which seemed like the echo of a lingering fancy in his own mind. But he felt that it was a foolish fancy which could only distract his thoughts from the steadfast pursuance of the one object he had now in view.

“She is assured of it,” he answered, gloomily, “and I cannot doubt, since it was Nicol Janfarie who gave her the tidings with such proofs that she who desired as eagerly as myself to discover some loophole of escape from the doom of separation her brother’s fate brings upon us could not find any.”

“Still she might have been deceived.”

"No, for Nicol is an honest youth, who would not for any bribe join so base a league."

"He, too, might have been deceived."

"Do not torture me with these surmises. I am too willing to give them lodging in my thought; and to rise into the bright land of hope only to be hurled back to despair would be torture, sharper even than that I now endure. Give me work to do, and the madder the enterprise in which you engage me the readier I will be to undertake it."

Panther, whose mind was too busy with the political intrigues in which he was involved to give much consideration to the finer sentiments of life, was too generously disposed toward his friend not to feel some sympathy with his passionate anguish.

"I will be silent," he said, "but I will

not forget. Meanwhile, such service as you seek is ready for you."

"Will it help me toward Cochrane?"

"Straight."

"Then I am ready."

"You have not asked what is the service on which you are to be employed?"

"It is work that only a desperate man may do, I understand, and that is enough for me."

"So desperate that every step you make will be at the points of a thousand swords and halberds."

"That is what I wish to find. Life is the hazard that I throw, Cochrane's ruin is the prize I have to win, whilst death is the grim supervisor of my play."

"If you succeed your foe will see the failure of the crowning exploit of his career; and a gibbet will reward his ambition and his knavery."

"Quick! let me begin the task. I am like a man parched whilst standing within sight of water."

"The task is to rescue his highness the Duke of Albany."

"He is still a prisoner in the castle of Edinburgh?"

"Yes, by Cochrane's treachery."

"What fatal influence does the knave possess that he can drive the King, who is so gentle in himself, to such foul dealings with his nearest kin?"

The Abbot shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly.

"His Majesty's gentleness proceeds to the extremity of timidity, and it is by that weakness his minion rules him. He is obstinate, too, and is unwilling to acknowledge, even to himself, that he has erred in judgment. He knows the unpopularity he has earned by his persistent support of

Cochrane and the other parasites who have fastened upon him, and who will destroy him. But he lays the blame on the wrong shoulders ; he blames his nobles and the people for their opposition, and he refuses to take the one step which would satisfy them—which would ensure their fidelity and avert rebellion—that is, to remove his favourites.”

“Something of that I have observed ; and I have had too sure a proof of his credulity in the continuance of his favour to Cochrane after the fate of Mar, to believe that any measure short of revolution will persuade him that his policy is false and cruel.”

“It is not his Grace’s policy ; it is that of his parasites. They know that when the King learns to trust his friends their downfall is fixed. And so the discontent which has been with good reason loudly

expressed by nobles and commons has been represented to him as the advanced signals of a civil war.

"But can he not see that they are the outcries of a country oppressed by the measures he has imposed at the instigation of greedy satellites?"

"No, he cannot see, for he listens only to those whose business it is to misrepresent everything that may affect their own interests. On the night of Mar's assassination and of your arrest the King dismissed Cochrane with the determination that in the morning he would investigate every detail of the strange transaction, and punish the guilty without mercy. He even suspected his favourite."

"In the saints' name, then, how did he alter his purpose so completely before the council met?"

"You will see! Early in the morning

Cochrane prayed for an audience. He was refused at first ; but he knew that his head was in the balance, and he tried with new energy the argument which has served him so well at other emergencies. He declared that his Majesty's throne and life depended on an immediate audience being granted to him."

"And he prevailed?"

"Ay, unhappily so. He showed the King proofs of a powerful conspiracy to dethrone him, and to place the crown on Albany's head. His Majesty swore that they might place the crown on the duke's head if it pleased them, but they would have to seek the head in his black kist—which was equivalent to an order for the instant execution of his brother."

"Gracious heaven! what proofs had the villain which could drive his Grace to such extremity?"

"Letters which had been found in the possession of Mar, and on the unguarded words of which the worst interpretation might easily be put, for they were written chiefly by gentlemen who were smarting under the indignities and wrongs they had suffered at the hands of the royal favourites by the King's permission, if not his sanction. By some accursed agency the tablet containing the list of our friends which I entrusted to you formed one of the proofs, and helped to swell his Majesty's wrath and alarm."

"My evil fortune follows me in everything," muttered Gordon, chagrined that he had contributed in any way to the success of his enemy.

"Well, you must overcome it. We must not lament now, but act; and for that reason I wish you to understand the whole position. When Cochrane had wrought his

Majesty into the state of frenzy in which he gave vent to that threat, the knave was sensible of victory, and he pushed it to the utmost."

"In what fashion?"

"First he obtained an assurance that no blame should be charged to him for the death of Mar, and as a testimony of his master's confidence he was to receive any gift that he might consider sufficient. Then, what think you the ambitious loon demanded? Why, nothing less than the title of the murdered earl. Ay, and by my soul, the request was granted, although it was agreed that all the properties appertaining to the earldom should revert to the crown, save some trivial effects not worth counting. You see even at that moment of exasperation and terror our gracious monarch did not forget how to make a bargain. He would have made a rare packman if it

had not been his ill-luck to be a king. So he gave with one hand the empty title which quite satisfied him who received it, and with the other he grasped all that his dead brother had owned, which consoled him for the new peril he entered upon in rewarding his favourite for an act for which he knew his court and people thought the scaffold too poor a punishment."

"What followed?"

"Cochrane, restored to greater favour than ever, represented the popularity of the duke as a monstrous danger which there was only one method of removing. That method was to sweep away the friends of his highness by decrees of outlawry, and by the headsman's axe; and by attainting Albany himself of high treason, which would be the shortest road to the block. Then his head might be preserved in the

black kist amongst its other treasures, if such were his Majesty's pleasure."

"But the King could not consent to such a diabolical measure?"

"He was wrought up to a pitch of alarm in which all his wit deserted him, and he was ready to yield to any proposition that might be made to him, and that promised him security from the evils and dangers he believed to be pressing around him."

"Have you certain information of this?"

"Yes. I have it from the page Ramsay, who, being in attendance on the King, had been commanded to retire only to the embrasure of the window. His Grace had little thought then of the turn his audience was to take. He forgot the presence of his page, who, in consequence, heard most of what was said. Ramsay is a simple lad, owing me some favours, and by assuming

some knowledge of the converse, I elicited everything that it was necessary to know."

"It seems almost too horrible that almost immediately after the murder of one brother he should assent to the death of the other," exclaimed Lamington, astonished by what he heard.

"Do not blame him too much," proceeded Panther quietly; "remember, he has been persuaded that it is a question of his crown and life against the head of Albany; and in truth Albany has passion and ambition enough to place himself on the throne at any cost if he saw fair opportunity. But he has happily discretion enough not to attempt such a project without the most potent reasons for doing so—without, indeed, reasons which would be tantamount to an assurance of success. He has a daring heart, but he has a cool head; and for the honour of Scotland—

ay, for the King's own conscience' sake, he must be rescued from the doom to which Cochrane's villainy would consign him."

"He shall be rescued," returned Gordon, with fierce resolution.

Panther grasped his hand.

"I believe you will do it," he said with a gratified light in his eyes which imparted to his visage somewhat of its ordinary jovial expression. But presently it resumed the calm, reflective cast which characterized it whilst he had been making his important communication.

"I have not done yet," he continued; "when the council met it was only to be broken up in the abrupt fashion you have heard of; for the King was again utterly under the control of his minion, and obstinate in what he believed to be his own judgment of the affairs we were met to discuss."

"Could none of you influence him?"

"It is not easy to influence an obstinate man who is convinced that all those about him, save his especial friends, are hungering for his life. But what little effect our arguments might have had, we had no chance of trying. The injudicious haste of Angus afforded his Majesty the opportunity he desired of dismissing the council before we were able to make any decisive movement. I hastened to the Queen, begged her to give you what protection she might, and then quitted the palace, having too much reason to dread that since my presence there had become known, I might be provided with a lodging of a kind that disagrees with most liberal spirits."

"Angus and the others have withdrawn to their fortresses?"

"No—I joined them at the hostel, and when I had acquainted them that I had

directed a French sloop to put into Leith roadstead, as a precaution on my own account, they agreed that we should use it in securing his highness of Albany's retreat. So all journeyed to Edinburgh, where they await in secret lodgment to give what help they can in effecting the rescue. While you have been sleeping there, I have received further tidings."

"To what purpose?"

"A warrant has been granted for the execution of Albany, and to-morrow he will be beheaded if he escape not meanwhile."

"So soon. Then there is little time to take a fortress like the castle."

"Our stratagem must be the more promptly put into action, that is all."

"You have arranged the scheme, then?"

"Ay, and you must execute it."

"Give me your commands; I shall obey them to the letter."

There were two casks, one filled with Gascony wine, the other containing, besides wine, a coil of rope and a letter of instructions to the Duke of Albany, rolled up in a ball of wax. It was Gordon's task to convey these two casks to the prisoner in the castle, and, in the disguise of a French sailor, he succeeded.

The Duke found the rope and the letter warning him that his execution was fixed for the following day. Albany was a stalwart man, brave and prompt in action. That night he bade the captain of the guard sup with him, filled the unfortunate officer with wine, then stabbed him, and so obtained the keys of the apartments. Next, with the aid of the rope which Lamington had conveyed to him, Albany and his chamberlain escaped from the castle. His highness soon reached the waterside, where a boat lay in readiness to convey him on board the *Heloise*.

Upon finding himself safe on the deck of the sloop, his first thought was one of gratitude to Lamington.

“I cannot well offer you recompense, Gordon,” said the Duke earnestly; “for such service as you have rendered cannot be requited. But name what acknowledgment my sword or will can make, and I pledge myself to it, be it what it may.”

“Secure me the doom of Robert Cochrane, my lord, and you may hold yourself quit for any help I have been fortunate enough to give you.”

“Nay, man, that is a purpose so near to my own concerns that I cannot count it so much to your gain as to mine. Name something else.”

“Formerly your Grace partly promised your aid in obtaining justice to my father’s memory.”

“And I will keep my promise to a larger

measure than you can have hoped for. Now, my Lord Abbot, bid our captain make for Dunbar, that I may see the place garrisoned ; then ho, for France, and if cunning Louis will not aid my cause, then England shall, if I pay all Scotland for her arms."

During this brief colloquy the sails had been set, and a favouring breeze springing up, the sloop stood out to sea.






CHAPTER V.

AFFAIRS OF STATE.

“Then reid, reid grew his dark brown cheeks,
Sae did his dark brown brow ;
His luiks grew kene, as they were wont
In dangers great to do.”

Hardyknute.

 COCHRANE'S detached parties of pursuers returned one after another to Linlithgow with the same report of failure. Cochrane himself was the last to give up the chase.

He consoled himself with the thought that at any rate his rival was removed from his path as effectually almost as if

death had been the instrument of his removal. He could not believe that it was possible for Gordon to hover around him, knowing that he would pay the penalty of his life if detected on Scottish ground. But to make sure even in a matter which seemed so certain, he despatched spies in all directions, so that if Lamington were mad enough to remain in the country his whereabouts would speedily become known; and as he offered a considerable reward for the traitor's head, he believed that he would soon be gratified by the utter extinction of an enemy who surpassed him in courage, and seemed to be able to rival him in cunning.

When he had taken these measures, Cochrane proceeded to the King, and informed his Majesty of the escape which had been effected, praying him to show his displeasure for the negligence, if not

complicity, of Captain Murray by some fitting punishment, and to mark his royal indignation with the conduct of the Queen's lady, Mistress Katherine, by some decisive command, to bring her under the control of her lawful husband.

The King was surprised by the adventure, and rather amused by the result than indignant at it. He had slept well, and being really of a nature which shrank from extreme measures, save when excited by some outburst of passion, he was glad rather than otherwise that the prisoner had escaped from his favourite's clutches, whose resolution regarding him he suspected, although he did not know it.

"Man Rob," he said, playfully, "let the chiel go; he deserves free passage since he has been clever enough to get out of your gripe. Let him go, I say, and let Murray be. He has ay been a faithful servant

to our person ; so we will just hold this delinquency over his head to frighten him from doing the like again."

"But how can your Majesty be assured that your present clemency will not be the cause of his attempting the like again when occasion shall arise in which your gracious person may be more intimately concerned even than in the present case?" said the favourite, suppressing his own annoyance in affected interest for the safety of his royal master.

"Hoots, Cochrane, what's the use of perpetually worrying us and yourself with possibilities? Let him be, I say, and never fash your thumb about to-morrow."

"What of the lady, then, my liege?"

"Ah, that's the sore place of it all, I doubt," answered his Majesty, who was evidently in excellent humour this morning, with which the gloomy mood of his

fatigued minion ill accorded; "she's a clever lass, and a true; and on our faith, man, we like her all the better for what she has done."

"But your Majesty will not permit her offence to pass unnoted."

"No; our Majesty will place the errant damsel under strict surveillance until such time as our royal pleasure be further known. But, hark you, sir, she must be used with due respect, for which we will hold you accountable in every particular."

The pleasantry with which the King was disposed to treat everything this morning, and his impatience of any serious discussion would have dismayed any intriguer who had less knowledge of James's humours than Cochrane. But he had studied the impulses of his master so carefully, that no matter in what mood they were exhibited he knew how to deal with

them so that they might be turned ultimately in the direction of his own purposes.

Therefore, on the present occasion, he made his obeisance, and maintained a discreet silence on the affairs which were uppermost in his thoughts. He was satisfied that the events of the previous day, and the passionate resolutions which they had inspired in the monarch's breast, would recur to him by-and-by when he grew weary of the study of his art treasures with which he was for the time disposed to amuse himself.

The event justified his expectation. The Lord Chancellor had an audience of the King, and immediately thereafter Cochrane was summoned in haste to the royal presence. He was required to produce the documents in proof of the treasonable intents of the late Earl of Mar, the chief of which was calculated to show that the

earl had, by the wicked art of witchcraft and magic, conspired to bring about the death of his sovereign Majesty the King, whose effigy he had burned to that end.

In the examination of these papers all the superstitious alarms of the King, and his jealous suspicions of the projects and power of his remaining brother Albany, took possession of his mind again with new force. They blinded him to every sense save that of the necessity of protecting himself against the evil machinations with which his imagination surrounded him, and left him weakly susceptible to any dark suggestion that might be offered to him.

On the following morning a courier arrived from Edinburgh with the tidings of Albany's escape from the castle. The news intensified the monarch's fears, and caused him to draw closer to his favourite

by the confirmation these events appeared to give to all that Cochrane had represented.

But at first the King refused to credit the news. He rode to the castle with all speed to investigate the matter himself.

He surveyed the tower, the wine casks, and the dead soldiers; he traced the route of the fugitives to the battlements, where the rope by which the descent had been made still dangled in the wind, and then the King stood for some moments in speechless bewilderment, gazing blankly at the precipice and at the expanse of country beyond, his eyes lingering long on the glistening bosom of the Forth.

The discovery had not been made until the morning light revealed the rope to the watch. That excited the suspicion which had been lulled by the knowledge that the captain and three of the guard were

carousing in the duke's lodging. Probably this circumstance had rendered the sentinels of the night less sedulous in the discharge of their duty, and contributed to the success of the prisoner's bold venture.

Instant search was made; the door of the chamber was forced, and the unpleasant truth was thrust upon the governor of the castle that the captive had slipped through his fingers.

The same truth was forced upon his Majesty as he stood on the battlement vaguely surveying the picturesque plain beneath. When he roused himself from his reverie, he issued his commands for an immediate pursuit with more promptitude and decision than was his custom.

He was haunted by the prediction of the astrologer—of which his favourites reminded him often enough to keep it firmly fixed in his memory, even if he had been of

a nature to forget such things—and the present circumstances seemed to be tending so directly to the realization of the prophecy—that a lion was to be killed by his own whelps—that the unhappy King obtained a species of firmness from the apparent desperation of his cause.

But it was a firmness which prompted him to the darkest measures for his own protection, and placed him more than ever in the hands of Cochrane and the others, of whose fidelity he deemed himself secure, since their interests were wholly dependent on him. The consequence of this wretched policy was naturally to render his position still more antagonistic towards the nobles upon whose honour and strength he should have relied for support against whatever treasonable purposes his brother might entertain.

The knowledge that some blame might

attach to him for the death of Mar, and that Albany obtained additional favour from the populace, on account of that dismal affair, rendered the King all the more suspicious of every one who was not directly under his control, and absolutely bound to him by personal necessities.

The pursuers returned on the night of the succeeding day, having had no better success than the discovery that the duke had garrisoned Dunbar castle and sailed for France, leaving Gordon of Lamington behind in charge of the affairs of his highness.

A strong force, under command of Lord Evandale, the Chancellor, was mustered, and marched against Dunbar to lay it under siege, with directions from the King to obtain possession of the fortress at any cost.

Whatever leniency his Majesty might

have been disposed to show Lamington before he had been made aware of that gentleman's reported activity on behalf of Albany, he was not likely to give him the benefit of it now. He regarded the knight with a feeling that was almost vindictive, and bade Cochrane deal with him in what manner he deemed best.

But during the days occupied in preparations for the expedition against Dunbar, and whilst the siege was in progress, the King was moody, fretful, and suspicious of every one who approached him. He secured his treasures in his black kist with new locks; he spoke little, and that little was of a melancholy and nervous character, which alarmed the Queen for the state of his mind. That his body suffered from the unhealthy nature of his broodings was plain to the most careless eye.



CHAPTER VI.

THE KING'S COMMAND.

“Now wae be to you, fause Blackwood,
Ay, and an ill death may you dee!
Ye were the first and foremost man
That parted my true love and me.”

Marchioness of Douglas.

KATHERINE JANFARIE sat by the window of the chamber which had been really her prison for some time now; for although the kindness and favour of Queen Margaret obtained her many indulgences, even her Majesty's intercession failed to obtain for the unhappy lady little more liberty than

the most closely confined tenant of a dungeon enjoyed.

She was dressed in deep mourning, which made the deathly pallor of her face the more striking. It was a pitiable face to look on—it was so very fair, and yet so sad. So still, so full of sorrow, utterly without hope, that it might have been limned as the countenance of despair.

The expression was that of one weary of life, and waiting for its close in a state of cold insensibility to all that passed around her.

The expression never changed—there seemed to be no joy potent enough to dispel her gloom, and no further sorrow capable of deepening it.

Her head was slightly bowed, and her eyes seemed to rest on her hands, which, worn almost to transparency, lay crossed on her lap, whilst she listened to the pas-

sionate utterances of the youth who stood near her.

It was Nicol Janfarie, whose garb bore traces of recent conflict. In several places it was rent and pierced; the breast-plate which he wore was dented as if by blows, and his left hand was rudely bandaged, indicating a wound which, for lack of opportunity, had not been properly dressed.

But most of all, his usually frank and generous boyish countenance betokened the strife he had recently passed through. It was now begrimed with dust, and set in an expression of fierceness which made him appear much older than his years warranted. His hair was tossed confusedly, and his eyes were animated with a light in unison with the expression of his features.

“Are you deaf, sister, or dumb, that you make no answer?” he exclaimed hotly, and not without a degree of that petulant irri-

tation which a youth displays when disappointed of the approbation which he feels his deeds have merited.

“I hear you, Nicol,” she said, in a low, abstracted tone.

“And you are not moved?” he cried, amazed by her indifference.

“Moved? The clang of arms fills me with sickness; the thought of the honours they may win reminds me of the hearts they will make desolate in the struggle, until I could wish every man a coward that he might shrink from the glitter of a sword with my horror.”

“Yet you are the daughter of Janfarie, and my sister! I tell you that the castle of Dunbar has yielded to the King's arms, and his troops are in possession of the stronghold. Every knave who stood against us, save three loons who dishonoured themselves by early flight, is

prisoner, or lies cold and stark at his post. We won it by a pretty assault," he went on with growing enthusiasm; "and my share of the work was not ill done, since the Lord Chancellor charged me with the despatches for his Majesty, as a token that I had acquitted myself fairly. I tell you this, and you answer by wishing that all men would shrink like cowards from a sword!"

"It was Lord Evandale who sent you hither, then?" she said, musingly, and without heeding the intelligence which was to him of the first importance.

"Ay, his lordship; and I have ridden without pause to care for my wound or to make myself presentable to his Majesty. But Cochrane also had directed me to ride hitherward the instant after the castle submitted to our arms. I have not brought the tidings he longed for, though, and that

I longed to bring. I would have given all else to have been satisfied in that one matter."

His young face darkened with rage, and his right hand became clenched.

Katherine observed this change from the enthusiastic remembrance of a successful battle, to the moody chagrin of disappointed vengeance. Her own face became a shade paler.

"You mean?" she queried, with a faint sign of interest in what he said.

"I mean that Lamington was not amongst those who fell, or amongst those who were taken," he returned, scowling on her.

"Then he was one of the three who escaped," she said, her breath quickening, and a scarcely perceptible tint of colour overspreading her face.

Nicol ground his teeth and stamped his foot angrily.

“I have found the means of interesting you at last, sister,” he cried; “but though the words choke me I will satisfy you, on condition that, after, you will answer me.”

“I will answer if it be in my power to do so.”

“I know it is—therefore, will you or not?”

“Surely, if it can advantage you——”

“There must be no ifs,” he interrupted. “Do you promise?”

“As you will.”

“Then, if it content you, know that the murderer of our father, the slayer of our brother, the destroyer of all our fortunes, was not amongst those who fell or who were captured, and neither was he with the three who fled!”

“Are you sure of that?”

She looked at him, and there was eager-

ness in her eyes, although so faint that it was the movement rather than the expression which denoted it. Nicol paused an instant to gaze searchingly in her face; and then, with a calmness which contrasted strangely with his previous passion, he answered—

“You mind, sister, with what thirsty joy I used to follow the stag over mountain and dale, and with what pride I used to bring my trophy home. Lad as I was, the foresters counted me no mean sportsman, for my hand was steady and my eye was keen at the moment when both were needed most. But I never tracked quarry with zest so deep, with hand so steady, or eyes so sure as I now follow Gordon. The spirit of our father stalks by my side, the spectre of our brother leads me on—the prey may baffle me a thousand times, but he will fall at last.”

“ Well ? ”

She seemed indifferent or insensible to the fierce hate and the greedy hunger for revenge which his regulated tones breathed; at any rate she made no effort by word or look to turn his purpose. But, indeed, she knew that to have attempted it would have been like dropping oil on fire in the hope of extinguishing it.

“ Well,” he continued, still without the least recurrence of his boyish passion, “ do you think that I am likely to be deceived as to his whereabouts? If he had been lurking in the darkest hole or on the highest tower of Dunbar, I would have found him. I went there, not as a little while ago I would have done, to prove myself worthy of our name, I went there to find him.”

“ And failed.”

“ Ay, failed. He was not there, and the

captain of the garrison acquainted me that he had quitted the fortress on the same day that he had entered it with Albany. None knew whither he had gone or with what intent."

Her breast seemed to fall and rise very gently, as if relieved. She removed her eyes from his face and said in the low, listless tone with which she had first spoken to him :

"I am glad of that."

Her words appeared to wound him sharply, and he had difficulty in restraining an exclamation of rage at the revelation of the sentiments with which she still evidently regarded one whom she ought to have loathed, as he thought.

"You still think of him," he said, gloomily; "but we will not talk of that. I claim your promise, and I conjure you by the memory of the dead, and by the

gracious powers of heaven, answer me truly."

She was awed by the solemnity of his words and manner; for the occasion seemed to render the youth a man of grave purpose commanding respect.

"I have not heard your question," she replied, trembling slightly, for instinct warned her of the nature of what followed.

"You know where the assassin has sought shelter—declare his hiding-place."

She remained silent, gazing at her hands.

He stood watching her, and struggling with wrath and emotion of various kinds. Suddenly the lad dropped upon his knees, clasping his arms around her, and there were tears in the eyes he raised to her pallid face.

"Kate—Kate," cried the brother, imploringly; "before this man came like a

curse to our hearth, I loved you, and you cared something for the wild boy who knew no desire that he would not curb for his sister's pleasure—no task so difficult that he would not undertake for her sake. See him now on his knees, praying you to denounce the slayer of his father and yours—of his brother and yours. You cannot—you DARE not deny him.”

His youth, the simple memory of happier days, which he recalled, his half-suppressed passion, and the authority his position gave him—all these combined to strengthen his appeal, and disturbed the torpid sensibilities of her heart more than anything which had passed between them yet.

She sobbed feebly, and she passed her hand through his tangled hair with the manner of one who seeks to soothe a child; but for a while she could not speak. He seeing that she was yielding, renewed his

entreaty, reminding her of the duty they both owed to the dead, and beseeching her to purchase her own peace and his by divulging Gordon's hiding-place.

"The Sacred Mother knows the agony I have endured," she said at length; "and I am glad in my heart that I am spared the new misery of being the instrument of his death or yours. I am glad that I cannot answer you, Nicol."

"Cannot?" he said, suspiciously, and disappointedly drawing his head back.

"Cannot, and would not, if it were in my power. Do not start from me till you have heard all. When you first brought me the tidings of Richard's fate, it was I who ventured everything to release Gordon from his prison."

"Accursed be the hands that——"

"Hush!" she cried, firmly, and holding him as he attempted to start away from

her; "I am your sister still. Spare me your hatred if you can. Since Gordon's escape I have been kept close prisoner here—not treated harshly, but yet a prisoner. You have been kept ignorant of my state whilst you have been urged on like a sleuth-hound to the destruction of one who would have been our truest friend, but whom misfortune and the evil intrigues of an enemy have separated from us."

"You speak of Gordon?"

"I do. The blame is not his, but mine. The vengeance which you desire should be wrought on me; for the blood of father and brother are not on his, but on my hands. So, Nicol, go no farther afield, but take your vengeance now and here."

The dolorous condition in which he had found her, and this wild self-accusation, impressed Nicol with the fear that her reason was failing. He was dismayed in

consequence, for although he had all the impulsive passion of youth, he had a generous nature, capable of making great sacrifices for those whom he esteemed. For his sister he had the warmest affection, and he would have been glad to find any means to alleviate her sorrow, short of renouncing the sacred duty which he believed to be imposed on him of avenging the fate of his father and brother.

But he was unable to understand her rooted antipathy to Cochrane, who had shown himself the leal friend of their house, and he was not a little incensed by her persistent regard for Lamington. This feeling contended now with the tenderer sentiments which the spectacle of her grief aroused.

There had been some appearance of excitement in her manner whilst she spoke, and yet the accent was one of such utter

despair that it was like the melancholy chime of a funeral knell in the brother's ear.

She had risen ; and he now pressed her back on her seat, gently but firmly.

“ You are mad, sister, to speak thus,” he said gloomily. “ I know that you are speaking in this fashion only that you may baffle me in the pursuit of one whom you still so unnaturally love.”

“ I would baffle you, Nicol, for your own sake,” she answered.

“ That is a slight to me, and makes me only the more eager to encounter him,” he said, hurt by what seemed to be a doubt of his prowess.

“ But most of all,” she went on, unheeding his words, “ I would prevent your meeting for my own sake. Blood enough has been shed already on my account : and day and night I pray to heaven to spare

me from being the cause of further strife. Oh, Nicol, if you care for me as you would have me believe, pity me and renounce this hateful feud."

"Renounce it!" he exclaimed, passionately. "Shame upon you!—daughter of Hugh Janfarie; shame upon you!—sister of Richard Janfarie, who can forget their fall, and ask me, the last man of our house, to forego the one achievement that can make me worthy of the name I bear. Renounce the feud! The spirits of my father and my father's son would follow me through life and torture me with the memory of my falsehood to them. They would make my hand falter and my heart fail me at my sorest need if I forgot the requital which their fate demands of me."

"Can no prayer move you from this bloody purpose? Oh, Nicol, Nicol, will not they—cannot you be satisfied with the

misery that has befallen me? Will you not be satisfied with my lingering death?"

"Your death?"

"Ay, brother, my death, for this torture cannot endure very long. Body and mind must speedily fail under the agony I suffer. Can you not understand me? I tell you, brother, Gordon was more precious than life to me; yet I have renounced him. I have parted from him for ever for the sake of our father and Richard. You cannot know how much the separation has cost us both; but we have submitted to it for their sake. The sacrifice has left me hopeless and indifferent to life. I hold myself accountable for all the ill that has happened, and the weight of my sin presses upon me until I weary for death; and my imprisonment, even under Robert Cochrane's control, is of little moment to me. Is not all that atonement enough to you?"

Must you add to my anguish by the bloody fall of Gordon or yourself?"

He was moved by her appeal, and he responded huskily—

"I pity you, sister, and I would give my right hand to spare you."

"Then you will consent to withdraw from this cruel purpose?"

"I dare not; there is no mortal power can move me from that. But I will spare you so far as may be—I will not trouble you again by seeking your aid in discovering his hiding-place."

She clasped her hands as if resigning herself to fate.

"There is no hope," she murmured, "and the evil work must be wrought out to the end."

"Farewell, sister," he went on hastily; "if we meet again you will know that Lamington is no more."

He touched her brow with his lips, wrung her hand, and hurried away to hide the emotion which he could not help feeling at sight of her affliction, and the exhibition of which he thought unmanly even under such circumstances as these.

Katherine received his embrace as coldly as a statue might have done; and she made no movement to recall him when the door closed, deep as was the affection she entertained for the generous youth, in whose companionship she had spent so many of her happier days.

But although she failed to respond to his embrace his absence produced a marked effect on her, for those last words of his betokened that he had gone forth to deadly strife, from which he might never return.

A few moments after he had gone she started from the species of lethargy that had become almost habitual to her during

her imprisonment, and since she had parted with Lamington for ever.

The thought which quickened her now was that of Nicol's danger; for her heart seemed to stand still in horror at the bare possibility that he too might fall by the hand of the man she loved—ay, loved still in spite of all that had passed. Her pulse quickened as she strove wildly to find some means of saving him, for her terror made his fate appear certain.

“There is only one hope,” she reflected, distractedly; “Gordon must be warned, and by me. He will not deny my prayer to avoid, even by flight, the encounter which Nicol is madly determined to bring about. But where and how am I to communicate with him?”

That was a difficulty which she had no power to overcome; for, besides not knowing where Lamington might be found, she

had no messenger whom she could entrust with her warning.

Since the day following the escape of Gordon she had been placed under restraint; she had not been permitted to quit the apartments appointed for her use, and she had been strictly prohibited and guarded from holding communication with any one, save the persons charged by Cochrane with her safe-keeping. Of these, Ross was the chief, and no bribe could tempt him to be false to his master, of whom he stood so much in awe, and in whose power he had such firm reliance.

Occasionally she was allowed to have Mysie Ross to wait upon her; but the girl had evidently been cautioned and threatened, for she was timidly shy of conversation which had the slightest relation to the doings without the walls of the lady's chamber. Once Katherine had

asked her to convey a missive to the Queen, but the girl with a frightened look had told her that she dared neither carry letter nor word of mouth for any one without the sanction of Sir Robert Cochrane—now becoming known as the Earl of Mar.

But the kindly lassie looked so distressed in giving the refusal, that it was easy to perceive how gladly she would have consented if there had been any probability of accomplishing the task without detection. Katherine did not attempt to persuade her, for she feared that the discovery of the attempt to appeal to her Majesty for help, might end in depriving her even of the occasional visits of Mysie. Therefore, she had concealed her disappointment as best she might, and told Mysie not to heed the unhappy circumstances which rendered her compliance impossible.

The imprisonment proceeded no further

than this entire seclusion. She was served with every delicacy the royal pantry could supply ; and she was waited upon by her gaolers with the utmost deference. Above all, Cochrane did not take advantage of her position to obtrude his society upon her. During the weeks which had elapsed since he had intimated to her that she was to be placed under restraint until his Majesty's pleasure should be made known, he had not once presented himself.

She was not deceived by this apparent consideration : at every turn she was made aware of the man's influence, and she knew that his silence was the result of his conviction that she was in his power, and of his desire to impress her with a due sense of that power. But if that had been his object, it had miscarried ; for she was so sick of life that her bondage gave her none of those pangs she would have suffered had

there been the least hope for her beyond the walls of her prison-house.

There was none, and she suffered without one word of complaint more than might have been implied in her desire to obtain an audience of the Queen.

Now, however, the anxiety to save her brother from the consequences of the deadly feud in which he was engaged, quickened the springs of life, and her silken bonds became as hard to bear as fetters of hardest iron.

The only prospect she possessed of accomplishing the object which reanimated her was by the aid of Mysie, and she determined to make another effort to win the girl's service at their next interview.

Some hours had elapsed since the departure of Nicol, when she arrived at this resolution. Her pale cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were brighter than they had been for many days.

The door opened and the man Ross appeared. He was slightly amazed by the satisfactory change in her aspect and manner—for she had been pacing the room, and she confronted him with something of her old dignity and resolution.

With a respectful inclination, he intimated that the King's page, John Ramsay, of Balmain, desired speech with her.

Somewhat surprised by the arrival of this special emissary from his Majesty, she assented to the interview, and Ross retired. Ramsay, who afterwards became a man of some account, was at this period scarcely sixteen years of age. He had a comely person, polite manners, and arrayed in the gay trappings which became his years and office, he seemed a gentle lad, worthy of the esteem his royal master bestowed on him. His brow was unmarked by the furrows of anxious thought, for he had yet

little to do with the numerous State intrigues which surrounded him. This was the more fortunate for him, as he had the courage and audacity natural to high-spirited youth, and therefore, placing some dependence on his manhood, he might have been easily led into several conspiracies, but for the simple fidelity with which he served the King.

Entering with cap in hand, he gracefully saluted the lady. But when he had performed that act of courtesy, he stood dangling his hat and hesitating, as if the duty he had to discharge were a somewhat awkward one. At length :

“I have to greet you, madam, in the name of his Majesty the King.”

Katherine inclined her head, acknowledging her submission to the royal pleasure. The page, Ramsay, gained confidence and proceeded :

“His Majesty is graciously pleased to inform you, madam, that in consideration of your loyal services at a moment of some excitement, he deigns to overlook the active part taken by you in aiding the escape of the prisoner Gordon, of Lamington, of which your own lips made free confession.”

“His Majesty’s generosity is greater than my deserts might claim,” she answered quietly, but with brightening eyes in anticipation of what might be to follow.

“It is my good fortune, therefore, madam, to be privileged to acquaint you that from this hour no further restraint will be placed upon your movements.”

Her heart beat quick with joy at this announcement, for it seemed to provide the opportunity she so much desired of finding a messenger by whom to communicate with Lamington.

The obstacles to this purpose which a moment before had been so huge were dispelled as by the touch of a fairy wand. She checked the eager thanks she was about to express on observing that Ramsay had something more to say.

“The only condition, madam,” he went on, “attached to this gracious remission of your offence, is that you shall not quit the palace, save in the train of her Majesty the Queen, or when attended by an escort befitting your position.”

Her joy was not abated even by this limitation of her privilege, although she perfectly understood that the polite phrases of her informant implied a much greater degree of restraint than might be at first apparent.

“My position, sir,” she said, “demands little state; but I submit myself in all things to his Majesty’s pleasure, and hold

myself bound to him in all gratitude for the clemency with which he visits my offence, and for the release which he has been pleased to grant me now."

"Pardon me, madam," said Ramsay, with a slight return of his former awkwardness; "but I have not yet discharged all my instructions, or you would understand why your position becomes a matter of consideration."

"I attend, sir," she rejoined, with a degree of surprise.

"It is further his Majesty's pleasure that you, madam, should conduct yourself as becomes the bride of the Earl of Mar——"

"Robert Cochrane?" she exclaimed, starting.

Ramsay bowed.

"The same, madam; for it is the will of his Grace that you should prepare yourself for the re-performance of the ceremony of

marriage with his lordship, as his Majesty is given to understand that there were some informalities in the celebration of the first ceremony at Johnstone. His Majesty therefore desires that you will hold yourself in readiness for the bridal which will be appointed for an early date."

Katherine was stunned by this intimation. This was the cause of the King's clemency, and the real purport of his message: that she should prepare herself, under the penalty of his royal displeasure, to accept Robert Cochrane as her husband.

The days of solitude and miserable reflection through which she had passed had fixed upon her mind the conviction that union with Gordon was impossible. She had come to believe also in the gloomy meditations of her solitude, that the anguish she experienced on account of the eternal

separation from her lover was even sinful ; but she had not come to regard Cochrane with one degree less of abhorrence than before.

And so the verdict fell upon her like a thunderbolt. An innocent prisoner unexpectedly condemned to die could not have endured greater torment than Katherine suffered when she heard the King's command to prepare for this marriage.

But Nicol was to be saved, and any violent opposition at this juncture would deprive her of the opportunity of accomplishing that purpose. She therefore, with a mighty effort, composed herself to answer with seeming calmness.

"I am his Majesty's loyal servant," she said, inclining respectfully, "and will give his behest all the obedience my circumstances permit."

"Is that your answer, madam ?" said

the courteous page, as if doubting whether or not it were enough.

“That is my answer.”

Ramsay bowed low and retired.






CHAPTER VII.

A TRIAL OF SKILL.

“She looked east, and she looked west,
To see what she could spy ;
When a gallant knight came in her sight,
And to the gate drew nigh.

“‘You seem to be no gentleman,
You wear your boots so wide :
But you seem to be some cunning hunter,
You wear the horn so syde.’”

Lady Margaret.

FTER the first shock of the intimation that the King was to give all the weight of his authority to the purpose to which Cochrane held with a persistency out of all propor-

tion to the object to be gained, as it seemed to her, Katherine endeavoured to compose her thoughts. She strove to direct them away from her own affairs to those of her brother. She could not altogether escape the consciousness that the dismal events which had transpired since she fled from the tower of Johnstone had proved impotent to save her from the fate which she had hoped to elude by her flight; but that consciousness helped to quicken her desire to prevent the final catastrophe of a meeting between Gordon and Nicol, and so strengthened her for the task.

What she was to do when that object was accomplished she did not know. Whether she was to resign herself hopelessly to the destiny against which she had struggled so long, and which now seemed more inexorable than ever, or whether she was to accept the last refuge

left open to her—death—she had not time to think. One thing only was clear, that in the mean while she must display no greater opposition to his Majesty's will than by praying the Queen to obtain for her as much delay in the appointment of the ceremony as possible.

The difficulties in the way of communicating with Gordon appeared to be almost insurmountable. Every one in the palace still seemed to be subject to Cochrane, either by fear of his power, or by hope of his aid to advancement. Where, then, could she hope to find a faithful courier? She was not one to be intimidated by apparent obstacles, and she set to work, determined to hazard everything.

First, she examined herself in a mirror, and tried to remove all traces of agitation from her countenance. Having done that she summoned her attendant—or gaoler, as

he might have been more fitly designated—Ross, and requested him to permit his niece Mysie, to wait upon her, as she was about to prepare for an interview with the Queen.

The man was unusually civil.

“I will send her to you instantly, madam,” he said, humbly; “and if there be any other matter in which my poor services may avail you, I will be proud to obey your commands to the uttermost.”

This address was sufficiently curious, considering the former taciturnity of the man, to attract her attention, and she regarded him with unconcealed surprise.

Observing the effect his words had produced, he hastened to explain.

“You’ll no think this odd, my lady, if you please, because, though I may have appeared a wee thing dour heretofore, it has not been wi’ my will.”

“Thank you, Ross,” she replied, cautiously; “if I should need your assistance, I will remember what you have just said.”

“You will do me great honour, madam;” and with much apparent subservience he withdrew.

She was much in need of the help this man could afford her; but his sudden proffer of it rendered her suspicious, for it resembled the clumsy effort of a maladroit knave, to win her confidence for his own ends.

Still her need was great, and the very clumsiness of the apparent knavery was an argument in favour of the man’s sincerity. He might be deficient in cunning, but his master was too shrewd to permit him to make a proposition so openly as this had been made with any expectation of success.

Thus driven by her extremity to grasp the frailest reed of hope, she sought reasons

to justify belief in Ross's good faith, notwithstanding his relation to Cochrane, and the strongest reason of all was what seemed the clumsiness of the attempt to deceive her. The idea did not occur to her that on this very clumsiness the subtle calculation of the favourite might depend for success.

Her suspicion, however, was not altogether appeased. She saw with what ease this man might relieve her of the difficulty in which she was placed ; he could at once secure her a suitable courier, if his position would not permit him to become the courier himself ; and the temptation to trust him was strong in proportion to her anxiety to find any means of achieving her object. But she was shy of every one who owed the remotest allegiance to Cochrane, and she resolved to test the man in some way before placing too much credit on his words.

A timid knock at the door was followed by the entrance of Mysie.

The girl appeared to be ill at ease, and held the corners of her apron with nervous fingers. She hung her head as if in shyness; and when desired to approach, she did so with apparent trepidation, as if afraid.

Katherine was not a little amazed by this behaviour, for the girl, although always respectful, had been previously prompt and self-possessed in obeying any direction. She was still more amazed on observing that Mysie's usually ruddy complexion was now pale, and her eyes showed traces of tears.

"Why, how is this, Mysie?" she asked, taking the girl's hand kindly; "you have been crying, and you look as timid as if——"

Mysie interrupted her by a quick gesture

of distress, and a glance towards the door, as if she feared that some one might be listening. Then she answered, reservedly :

“There’s naething wrang wi’ me, my lady.”

Katherine was perplexed ; the manner and the words so directly contradicted each other. Lowering her voice, she said :

“There is something wrong with you, Mysie. Who has frightened you ?”

The girl looked up as if imploring her not to inquire further, and answered, but without any attempt to lower her voice—indeed, she seemed almost desirous that some mysterious taskmaster should hear her diligently repeat his instruction :

“I’m to wait on your ladyship constantly now, and I’m to go and come whenever and wherever you may bid me.”

The restraint was so inexplicable, and yet so marked, that Katherine was at some

loss how to deal with the girl. She, however, answered discreetly, as she thought :

“I am glad you are to be allowed to remain with me, Mysie, as I shall require your services in many ways.”

But this seemed to disturb Mysie more than anything else. Abruptly she stooped down on her knees, and began to arrange some imperceptible defect in the folds of the lady's skirt. Then, without raising her head :

“Dinna ask me to do anything that you wouldna like ither folk to ken about.”

“I will have to ask you to do much that none but my friends know about.”

“No—no! Dinna ask me, for I can do naething. I'm watched and you're watched on every hand. I'm sent here only to betray you—that is what is wrang wi' me.”

“You must explain what this means. Let us go into the bedchamber.”

“No yet—bide a wee.”

Katherine waited. Mysie busied herself about various trivial matters, and by-and-by went out on the pretence of fetching something. She returned in a few minutes, and by a slight movement of her hand indicated that they might retire to the inner apartment now.

Katherine obeyed the signal, and was followed respectfully by Mysie, who left the door of communication open.

“We had better have the door that way,” she whispered, “so that if anybody tries to come in we’ll see.”

Katherine sat down and eyed her companion curiously.

“Now, Mysie, tell me what all this strange conduct means,” she said, cautiously, lowering her voice as her attendant had done.

Mysie placed herself in a position which

enabled her to command a view of the outer chamber.

“It means, my lady,” she answered, agitatedly, “that you have been told you are free to do what you like, just that you may be made to betray yourself, and to decoy your friend to his ruin.”

Katherine was startled by this disclosure, for it gave a very unpleasant explanation to the sudden alteration in her position from that of imprisonment to one of comparative liberty. It showed her that she had been set free in order that she might be made the instrument of destruction to Lamington.

“How do you know this?” she queried.

“I wish you wouldna speir,” was the constrained response.

“I must ask you, Mysie; for be the danger what it may to me or those I love, it must be encountered. But if I know

what the danger is, and from what quarter to expect it, I would be the abler to cope with it. You will not deny me, then?"

"Have I no said enough in telling you to trust naebody, and to do naething that can bring harm to you or your friends?" cried the girl, distressedly.

"Well, if you refuse, I must ask your uncle—he offered to assist me."

Mysie cast a quick, terrified look at her mistress, and the desire to help her seemed to be struggling in her mind with the dislike to speak ill of her relative. The former feeling got the best of the struggle.

"I shouldna' say ony ill of him," she said, hanging her head, as much abashed as if she had been confessing a fault of her own; "he has been a guid friend to me; but he is my lord's most faithful man, and to serve him would cheat his nearest kin."

Katherine clasped her hands and eyed the girl piteously. The barriers between her and the object she had at heart seemed to be growing more stupendous every moment.

“He wished to gain my confidence, then, only that he might disclose my secrets to his master?”

“Just that.”

“But I can trust you—I will trust you, Mysie.”

“No, no—dinna trust me either,” cried the girl, tears starting to her eyes; “for that’s just what they want you to do.”

“You surely would not betray me?”

“Oh, I dinna ken what I might do,” rejoined Mysie, wringing her hands in bewilderment. She was sorely afflicted by her strong wish to help the lady, in spite of her uncle’s commands, whilst her sense of the duty she owed him restrained her.

At the same time she was frightened by the bare thought of doing anything in opposition to the will of her uncle's master and patron.

Katherine had little difficulty in comprehending the girl's sentiments, and although she was ready to give her the utmost confidence, she hesitated to involve her in any way in the troubles which she ought to endure alone.

"But I know what you will do, Mysie," she said, quietly; "you will warn me when I am in danger of exposing my plans to any of the spies who surround me, and you will keep faith with me whenever I may ask you to do so."

"I would bite my tongue off rather than tell anything that would hurt your ladyship."

"I was sure of it. Now be content. I will not ask you to do anything that you

do not feel yourself able to accomplish without much risk."

"It's no the risk to mysel' that I heed; it's the risk to you."

"Take no account of that," answered Katherine, sadly. "I am prepared for the worst that can happen to me."

"You may escape from this place."

"I have no wish to escape."

"No wish to escape?"

"None; for where could I fly to? Not to Johnstone, for my mother would only deliver me back into the hands of the man whose fatal power has destroyed every hope that made life precious; not to Lamington, for the dead forms of my father and brother stand between us, parting us eternally."

"What is it you seek to do, then, my poor mistress, since you are content to remain here?"

“Only to bid Gordon avoid Nicol Janfarie—to spare him for my sake at any cost, at any disgrace to himself.”

Mysie was silent for an instant, and then, with a glow of simple enthusiasm on her honest face, she said :

“I will help you, if I should have to be your messenger myself.”

With that promise the generous girl renounced her allegiance to the servile kinsman who had claimed her obedience in an act of cruel treachery.

Katherine embraced Mysie and kissed her affectionately : it was so much to have found one friend in the midst of so many enemies.

“It is the wit of two women against the knavery of Robert Cochrane and his myrmidons,” she said, with a flush of scorn at the name ; “and we will overreach them with heaven’s help ?”

“ We'll try,” added Mysie, who trembled slightly at the reference to the potent favourite of the King.

That day passed without any scheme being devised by which a message might be conveyed to Gordon. The thing looked so simple, and was yet so hard to achieve, that the thought of it became tantalizing in the extreme.

No advance was made by the following morning, and every hour that elapsed rendered the probability of the encounter taking place before the warning could be given more and more appalling. Mysie had failed to discover any one who could be entrusted with the message, and who would not use the advantage which he would obtain as Katherine's courier to betray Gordon into the hands of Cochrane's men. The woman began to fear that Mysie would have to fulfil the extremity of her

promise and become the courier herself. But they resolved to wait another day before adopting that last resource.

Katherine was commanded to wait upon her Majesty, who was bound upon a hawking expedition, accompanied by the young prince. She received a gracious welcome from the Queen, but she had no opportunity of pleading her suit for delay of the marriage ceremony. She, however, did not wish to be precipitate in her appeal, and as the day had not been appointed yet, she deemed it wiser to refrain from all reference to it, until the crisis arose.

The hawking party rode slowly through the great gateway of the palace, and Katherine, with heavy heart, void of every gleam of interest in the sport to which she was proceeding, occupied her place amongst the other ladies in waiting. The morning was fine, and her companions merry ; but

the contrast of her dolour with their gaiety only made her position the more dismal.

By the road side, not far from the palace gate, a big, loutish-looking fellow sat, with a large hound lying at his feet, its bright eyes watching the face of its master with an expression that might have been taken to indicate the greater intelligence of the two creatures.

Katherine had never witnessed a more joyful spectacle than that peasant and his hound, for she recognized in the former Gordon's faithful follower, Muckle Will, and her blood tingled with delight.

Will sat staring with dull clownish curiosity at the cavalcade; but as it advanced he rose slowly to his feet, and although he preserved his simple manner he was busy scanning the faces of the ladies with much more than common interest.

When nearly opposite to him, Katherine's horse performed a rapid caracol which removed her a little way from her companions, and she dropped her glove.

Will jumped forward and picked up the glove before any of the attendants had time to observe what had happened. As he returned it to the owner, Katherine, whilst appearing to thank him, said in a quick whisper :

“Can you get into the palace?”

“I might get in, but the job would be to win out again.”

“I will arrange that—I must see you.”

She touched the horse with the whip and resumed her place in the cavalcade.

Never was sport so wearisome as that day's hawking to Katherine Janfarie, although everybody else declared it to have been one of the most successful days known for years.

As the train returned to the palace, she saw Will and his hound still at their post.

She told Mysie that every obstacle would be overcome now if she could only obtain a few minutes' speech with Will, and Mysie devised a plan on the instant.

She went out, and in about an hour returned with Muckle Will and his dog following her.

"How have you managed this?" inquired the mistress, amazed and delighted by the success of her coadjutor.

The maid blushed, smiled, and looked awkward.

"I just told the sentinel that the chiel was a particular friend of mine, and we wanted to hae a crack about auld acquaintances, and so I got him through the gate."

"And, my certes! I would just like to be the particular friend of sic a braw lass,"

muttered the giant Gallowegian, grinning with pleasure at the bare prospect.

Mysie blushed again, looked slightly angry, and then, with much meekness, went on :

“I waited till I heard my uncle was sent for by my Lord Mar; and as soon as I ken’d that, I brought the lad up by the back stair, and got him in here without anybody seeing us.”

“You are as clever as you are kind, Mysie,” said Katherine, gratefully.

“And bonnie into the bargain,” chuckled the simple giant. “Eh, Stark?”

Stark wagged his tail, expressive of entire concurrence in his master’s views.

“But dinna keep him here a minute longer than is needful,” proceeded Mysie, quickly. “I’ll watch the door.”

Katherine turned to Will, who repeated the clumsy salute he had made on his entrance.

“ You know where your master is ? ” she queried, anxiously.

“ Ay, my lady, I ken.”

“ He is safe ? ”

“ Ay, safe eneuch, so far.”

“ Is he well ? ”

“ Just as weel as a man wha has got nae sowl left in him for onything can be.”

The lady, with an effort, repressed a sob, and continued :

“ Did he send you here ? ”

“ Ay, he told me to bide about the yetts, or onywhere, so that I might get a glint o’ your face, and be able to tell him what like you were looking. I was to try and speak to ye, if possible, and to tell ye that ye will hear queer news before many days hae passed.”

“ Does he—seem happy ? ” Her voice faltered with the words, and she clasped her hands tightly.

“Happy?” echoed Will, shaking his shaggy head gloomily; “he’s as dour as a broken-legged hound, wi’ its nose on the quarry that it canna follow. But he’ll be better when he kens that I hae seen ye.”

There was a pause, during which the lady’s head was bowed, and she struggled against the wild temptation to fly to him, and try to comfort him in spite of the fell deeds which parted them. When she looked up, her glistening eyes, her pallid cheeks and quivering lips, denoted how severe had been the mental strife.

“Take this to him,” she said, delivering a letter which she had ready sealed for the purpose; “deliver it into no hands save his, as you value his peace and mine.”

“I’ll do your bidding,” was the simple response.

“But if by any ill fortune you should lose that paper, say to your master it was

written by me to implore him to avoid Nicol Janfarie, and to beg of him if they should meet to let no words or actions tempt him into strife. All this, say, is for my sake, and that only the assurance of his compliance with this prayer can give me any comfort. Will you remember?"

"We'll mind every word—will we no, Stark? That will we."

Katherine thanked him, gave him a piece of silver, which he accepted on Stark's account, and dismissed him under the care of Mysie.

The task which had presented so many obstacles was accomplished now with more ease and certainty than she had expected; and being accomplished, she sat down, sad and hopeless. Her sorrow was unrelieved by any demand for exertion outside herself, and there seemed to be no object in her own life that was worth striving for. She

relapsed into the state of despair from which she had been roused by the desire to prevent the meeting between Gordon and Nicol. Even the thought of the approaching union with Cochrane only made her start shudderingly and droop again into helpless inactivity.

Mysie having seen that the way was clear, conducted Will down to the court by the same stair by which they had ascended to the lady's apartments. They reached the court in safety, Will following the movements of his winsome guide with admiring eyes; and he was about to address her when she was startled by the voice of her uncle calling her name.

"Bide here, bide here," she whispered quickly, and sped away in the direction of the voice.

Will and Stark halted obediently, the former very much puzzled by the abrupt flight of the damsel.

But he had presently another matter for dissatisfaction. Some one touched him on the shoulder, and on turning his head he observed that six soldiers stood behind him. The one who had touched him spoke :

“ His lordship, the Earl of Mar, desires to see you, comrade.”





CHAPTER VIII.

“ MUCKLE ” WILL.

“ The Douglas turned him on his steed,
And I wat a loud laught leuch he—
‘ Of a’ the fools I have ever met,
Man, I hae never met ane like thee.

“ Art thou akin to lord or knight,
Or courtly squire, or warrior leal ?’
‘ I am a tinkler,’ quoth the wight,
‘ But I like crown-cracking unco weel.’ ”

Jock Johnstone.

FINDING himself surrounded by
six stalwart fellows, fully
armed, Will’s first thought was
to fight for his liberty ; but his second
thought showed him of what little avail
his weaponless hands could be against so

many. He therefore thrust his hand into the pouch in which he had placed the letter Katherine had entrusted to him, clutched it, and crumpled it into a ball. He closed his big hand over it, and held it there securely.

Then he grinned in the face of the officer who had addressed him, and answered :

“His lordship does me muckle honour ; but wha’ might he be, for I never heard o’ the chiel afore ? ”

“ You’ll have the chance of knowing him now—march,” said the officer.

The men moved. Will attempted to expostulate, and promised to come back and see his lordship another time ; but he was roughly hustled forward, and his words were unheeded.

Stark during these proceedings kept closely by his master’s side, looking up occasionally at his face, and growling as if

only waiting for the command to spring at the soldiers. Will, however, had no desire either to risk his own skin or the hound's in a useless struggle, and so he permitted himself to be driven forward, and the dog followed.

The party was obliged to halt in the ante-room of the earl's apartment, and there Stark gave vent to another protest against the whole proceedings by a low, prolonged growl. Will for the first time spoke to the faithful companion of his troubles.

“Haud your tongue, you ill-mannered brute,” he said, as if angry. “Do you no ken you’re in the King’s ain house, and gaun to seen ane o’ the King’s ain lords? There, take that bite atween your jaws, and haud it there just to keep your tongue quiet.”

Stooping, he thrust the crumpled letter

into the dog's mouth, and managed it so adroitly that none of those around him saw or suspected what the “bite” was with which he attempted to quiet the animal.

Will held up his finger warningly, and grinning, so that the soldiers and attendants looked at one another smiling at the evidence that the fellow was a half-wit.

“Noo, Stark,” said Will, confirming the impression of his imbecility by addressing the hound as if it had a human comprehension, “dinna ye be swallowing it a' at ance; keep it atween your teeth, lad, for guid kens whan ye'll get sic a bite as that again.”

He was at this moment commanded by an orderly to follow him, and he was conducted into the presence of the newly-dubbed Earl of Mar—a title which Cochran quietly and resolutely required every one to remember. He who forgot the fact

of the favourite's elevation, or failed to respect it, was made to suffer for it by some prompt penalty inflicted on him in whatever most nearly concerned him. Conscious of his inability to enforce the recognition of his newly-acquired dignity on those discontented nobles and gentlemen who were powerful enough or bold enough to stand in open opposition to him, he lost no opportunity of compelling the acknowledgment of his position from all who could not or would not risk the loss of place and influence by offending him.

The successful statesman was seated by a table upon which were spread numerous documents and charts with which he appeared to have been deeply occupied. When Muckle Will was ushered in, Cochrane looked up from his papers, scrutinized the man narrowly, and then signalled to the attendant to withdraw.

Will made his salute with respectful clownishness ; and whilst Stark amused himself by diligently gnawing a piece of paper, and tearing it in fragments, his master began to stare about him until he was abruptly accosted by a sharp clear voice :

“What are you doing here, my man?”

Will almost jumped from the floor, so sudden and penetrating had been the utterance. But if the speaker had been attempting to throw him off his guard, he failed.

“Saunts be wi’ us,” cried Will, in simple wonder ; “but ye gar’d my heart loup. What am I doing here?——’deed—and ye’ll first hae to tell me that yoursel’, sir ; for I came here on your honour’s lordship’s invitation, and no for any errand o’ my ain ava. I’ll be thankful when ye let me awa’ again, for I couldna thole to bide

in a place wi' sodgers on ilka hand, and prim-mouthed serving men everywhere glowering at ye at every step and turn as though they were feared ye was gaun to lift the house on your shouthers and make awa' wi' it."

Cochrane permitted him to run on, apparently trying to fathom the character of the man, whose freedom of speech did not seem in any way to betoken disrespect.

"Ah, you do not like the place. How did you enter it, then?"

Will looked sheepish, twisted his shoulders, and grinned slyly in the face of his inquisitor.

"Weel, my lord," he began slowly, "if I maun tell ye the real truth, it was a lass that tempted me in, and mony wiser folk nor me hae been led out o' their gate by the same temptation."

The inquisitor nodded and smiled ap-

provingly, as if interested in Will's adventure.

“And the name o' the lass?” he inquired.

“Hoots, my lord, I couldna tell ye that, for wha kens what use ye might make o't, and she's no fit for the like o' you, though she is a braw lass. Na, na, my lord, ye maun keep to your ain side o' the wa'.”

“Where are you going when you leave the palace?”

“Hame.”

“Where is your home?”

“No very far frae the Rhinns o' Gallowa'.”

The inquisitor pounced upon him now, having, as he thought, confused him by the diversity of his questions.

“You are in the service of Gordon of Lamington?”

"I'll no say but I might hae been," rejoined Will, quite composed.

"And you have received a letter for him from the lady who was known as Katherine Janfarie?"

"Have I so?"

"I know it."

"Weel, if your lordship kens a' about it, what's the good o' speering?"

"You must deliver that letter to me."

"But whar is it?"

"You have it. Come, come, my man, do not waste time, for you must obey me sooner or later, and it will be better for yourself to obey instantly. By proving yourself ready to serve me, you will find that I can be a good master."

"I would be loth to doubt that, or to disobey your lordship; but when a body hasna got the thing that's wanted, what way is he to do your bidding?"

“By telling me where you have hidden it.”

“Hidden it?—me hide it! What would I do that for?”

The evident simplicity of the man, and the cunning with which he admitted everything he could not deny, yet held back, by clever equivocal answers, the most important information required, puzzled the inquisitor not a little. Observing the fellow on his entrance, he had not anticipated any difficulty in obtaining from him a full confession, and he was therefore surprised that, after a conversation of several minutes' duration, he felt that so far he had been baffled by the shrewd yokel.

He did not like the feeling at all, although he had a sufficient appreciation of character, even when opposed to him, to be somewhat amused, knowing that ultimately his power must prevail.

“What is your name?” he said, quietly, again changing the subject.

“Will.”

“What else?”

“Muckle Will.”

“What else?”

Will scratched his head as if unable to conceive what more a man could require in a name; then, as if with a sudden recollection, he cried:

“Oh, folk whiles call me Muckle Will Craig.”

“Well, Muckle Will Craig, you are well named, and you have more wit than you seem desirous of appearing to possess; which is something in your favour, since most men are anxious to seem possessed of more than heaven has given them. I like you the better for it; so now tell me have you ever heard of the boot?”

“Ay, I hae heard tell o’ boots and shoon, too.”

“Yes, yes ; but this is an iron boot which we keep in the Castle of Edinburgh. It is a wonderful boot, and has been known to make even the dumb speak.”

“Od, man, it maun be a useful implement,” said Will, grinning as a child might have done at a fairy tale.

“Very useful,” continued his lordship ; “and especially so, when we have a dour or a foolish person to deal with, who refuses to answer civil questions. We just put the boot on him and wedge it up tight until he has spoken, or his bones are crushed into jelly.”

Will’s face gave a wry twist at this, and he muttered uneasily—

“I wouldna like to try on your boot, master.”

“Then we have, besides, some pretty little instruments which grip the thumbs in much the same fashion, and various

other contrivances by which to test the strength of stupid knaves who continue sullen and silent. Last of all we have a gallows."

Will's uneasiness increased; he shuffled with his feet, and drew his hands behind him as if the instruments of torture were already in sight.

"They maun be a wheen ugly things."

"Would you like to see them?"

"No, I'm muckle obliged to your lordship, but I hae nae curiosity about sic affairs."

"I thought so, but I am afraid, my man, we shall have to try the effect of them all on your sturdy frame—a course which I would be sorry to adopt with you, Will, because I would rather offer you a snug place in my service than make a cripple of such a brave looking fellow."

"Dinna do that, for ony sake, my lord,

for syne I would be nae use to onybody.”

“There is only one way to save yourself.”

“Weel, I’ll take that. What is it?”

“I am glad you are to be sensible.”

“Oh, I’ll be uncommon sensible if that will save me frae your boots and your irons and sic things.”

“Well, then, you must give me the letter you have got; and you must guide a small party of my friends to the hiding-place of Lamington. We are only anxious to show him a little courtesy, and to give him the attendance a knight of his position should have.”

Will scratched his head harder than ever, and glanced ruefully at the calm face of the gentleman who made this proposition so quietly, just as if there had been neither falsehood nor treachery connected with it.

“I havena got the letter, as I hae tauld ye,” he said, distressedly; “and as for taking your sodgers to surprise the master—Lamington, I mean—I canna do that.”

His lordship tapped on the table with the hilt of a poniard. Two troopers and the officer who had arrested Will appeared instantly to answer to the summons.

“Take that man,” said Cochrane, with a slow distinct utterance, as if to impress every word on the mind of the person most concerned, “and convey him to the castle. Let him be put to the torture until he has given the information required by this despatch; and if he continue obstinate——”

He paused as if to notice whether or not his words had produced any signs of submission; but Will remained silent and bewildered.

“If he remain obstinate,” proceeded the statesman, “under the torture, let him be

hung in chains on the public gibbet as a warning to all traitors and knaves.”

Still the man made no sign of repenting his resolution to remain faithful to his chief, and the guard laid hold of him to drag him away. But as they advanced for that purpose one of them trampled on Stark's toes, the dog uttered a sharp whine, and showed its teeth as if about to retaliate or defend its master. The officer was about to strike him when Will stopped him.

“ Dinna harm Stark, ye brute ; he canna tell ye ony secrets, sae ye needna put him in your boots and shoon. Let him be, will ye ? ”

Cochrane eyed the master of the dog attentively ; and then, half-amused by the display of affection and by the fancy which it suggested, he said, coldly :

“ Let the dog be quartered before the rascal's eyes.”

“Mercy, man, ye wouldna do that,” cried Will, becoming excited on Stark’s account, although he had remained quiet enough on his own. “What guid will it do ye to harm a dumb brute like that? He’s been a true friend and brither and neighbour to me ever since he was a pup, nae bigger nor your hand—dinna harm the dog.”

An impatient gesture of his lordship was the only answer to this extraordinary appeal.

The soldiers began to drag the prisoner away.

“Let the poor dog be,” he cried again, his huge frame shaking with agitation, “and I’ll do onything ye want wi’ me.”

“Where is the letter, then?” said Coch-rane, sharply.

“That’s it lying there, if ye maun ken,” answered Will, pointing to the fragments which Stark had gnawed into pulp, so that

not one legible character could be deciphered on them.

Cochrane gazed at the useless bits of paper, and although his countenance indicated nothing, he was amazed at the coolness and dexterity with which the half-witted fellow, as Will had been regarded, had over-reached him.

“Very well,” he said, presently, “since you have disposed of the document in that manner, it is now of little consequence to any one; but if you wish to keep your head on your shoulders, you must serve me all the more faithfully in the second matter. Where is Lamington concealed?”

“There are different places, according to the humour he is in and the chances o’ a surprise; but he leaves a sign at every ane he quits, sae that I may ken whaur to seek him.”

Cochrane turned to the officer.

“Take twenty of the hardiest troopers of your regiment, and accompany this fellow. He will guide you secretly and surely to the hiding-place of the outlaw, Gordon of Lamington, whom you are to arrest, alive if you can; but show him no mercy if he resist. Keep close to your guide, and at the first sign of treachery on his part hew him down. Go.”

The officer acknowledged his instructions and departed, followed by Muckle Will, who was very glad to escape the terrible presence of his catechiser, even in the company of a man who might on the merest breath of suspicion become his executioner.

When alone, Cochrane vainly endeavoured to make something out of the fragments of Katherine's letter; but Stark had done his work effectually.

“No matter,” he ejaculated, disappointedly, “these fragments will suffice to

satisfy his Majesty of her attempt to communicate with the rebel. The day shall be appointed before another hour has elapsed, and the ceremony performed with what expedition the churchmen will permit.”

He rose and paced the floor thoughtfully.

“There shall be no further delay, lest the weightier matters of State interfere, and some hazard—who knows what?—alter my master’s humour. Every obstacle is removed now, save her own perversity, and that must yield too; for she cannot become his bride even were he free and I a prisoner. But his doom is sealed. Yonder knave cannot, supposing he dared attempt it—deceive me. My gallant foe-man of Lamington, you may count your hours. Richard Janfarie and the boy Nicol have missed you, but my hand strikes with unerring force.”

His cogitations were interrupted by the

sudden entrance of his coadjutor, Leonard, the smith, to announce the arrival of a courier with secret despatches from England.

The information contained in the despatches was to the effect that a powerful English army was being mustered by command of Edward IV. to invade Scotland under the combined leadership of the Duke of Gloucester, and Alexander, Duke of Albany, who had been summoned from France for that purpose.






CHAPTER IX.

THE SECRET DESPATCHES.

“ The tidings to our gude Scots king
Came as he sat at dyne,
With noble chiefs in braif array,
Drinking the blude-red wine.

“ ‘ To horse ! to horse ! my royal liege,
Your faes stand on the strand ;
Full twenty thousand glittering spears
The King of Norse commands.’ ”

Hardyknute.

 OCHRANE was grievously disturbed by the intelligence conveyed in the secret despatches from England. They intimated that the Duke of Albany laid claim to the throne of Scotland, on the plea that the reigning

monarch was a bastard, therefore an usurper, and that he was otherwise unfitted to govern the country in consequence of weakness of intellect.

On these grounds the duke had besought the assistance of the English monarch to place him on the throne. In return for that service he had given his bond to restore the town of Berwick to the English, to acknowledge the suzerainty of their sovereign, to renounce all alliance with France, and to marry one of King Edward's daughters if the Church would permit. The latter event was somewhat improbable, as Albany had been already twice wedded, and both wives were still alive, the first having been divorced. Notwithstanding the nefarious nature of the proposal, Edward IV. received it with satisfaction, for he had been worsted in all former attempts upon the north country, and this seemed

to promise the opportunity of conquest which he desired. A force of twenty thousand men was placed under the command of the Duke of Gloucester—the same who soon after became Richard III.—and the army was already on the march northward, accompanied by Albany, who was confident that many of the Scottish Borderers and nobles would flock to his standard as soon as it was unfurled.

These were the tidings which startled Cochrane, and which he had now to communicate to the King. The openly-expressed discontent of the nobles, and the no less disaffection of the people, imparted to Albany's invasion a probability of success which indicated extreme peril to the life and government of James, and to all whose fortunes were linked to his.

Cochrane was well aware that he himself would be amongst the first of the victims to the duke's wrath.

The news fell on the King like a thunderbolt ; and for several minutes he was overwhelmed with dismay. From the date of the duke's escape he had been restless and misanthropical, anticipating evils on every hand ; and now his worst fears seemed about to be realized.

"Ay," he muttered, disconsolately, and pressing his hand on his brow, "the prediction of the stars is to come true, and the lion is to fall by his own whelps."

His favourites were standing around him, and the countenance of every one was as gloomy as their master's. None seemed to have any hope to offer him.

"You are dumb, sirs," exclaimed the monarch, bitterly, and glancing at his attendants as if disposed to blame them for his misfortunes. "You are dumb, and your souls quake. Angus and the rest have deserted me, and doubtless you, too,

will flee like the rest when you smell the burning of the house that has sheltered you. Have *you* no word of council or hope to offer us, my Lord of Mar? Or are you, as the one who has received the highest favour from our hands, the first to calculate the means of saving your own head by the help of your heels?"

Cochrane stood nearest to the King, and he received this outburst of suspicion with genuine agitation. Cold and stern as his nature might be, he was deeply affected by the spectacle of his royal master's despair.

"Sire," he answered, quietly, and there was even dignity in his evident sincerity, "your gracious pleasure has made me what I am; the eminence I have gained is due to your kindness more than to my own deserts. Your gracious pleasure has enabled me to become from a poor man the

possessor of wealth enough to insure me ease and comfort for my remaining years in some foreign land if I chose to forget the debt of gratitude I owe your Majesty, and to fly from you in the hour of danger like the base thing you suspect me of being.”

“Few men are ready to prove their gratitude with their lives—unless when they desire some further favour,” interrupted James, moodily, but eyeing his favourite with some curiosity.

“Perhaps, sire, I am one of the few,” proceeded Cochrane; “but the place you have given me has made me the mark of scorn, envy, and hate to many, and I know that my head will be the first to fall when your power fails to protect me. I might save myself; the way is still clear to me, and your Majesty has been good enough to indicate it. A week hence—a day hence—

it will be too late ; but at this moment the choice lies with myself. I have chosen, then ; and I remain by your side, my liege, to meet the worst, and to give you what help my poor wit and arm may be able to give in your extremity."

He spoke sincerely ; and whatever might be the unscrupulous nature of his dealings in pursuing his particular aims and ambition, Robert Cochrane was, at any rate, worthy of the favour he had received in the fidelity with which he served his master at various crises.

The King was visibly relieved by this display of loyalty, and more so when Rogers, Hommel, Leonard, Torphichen, and the rest hastened to assure him of their steady allegiance in good or ill. They could, indeed, do no less. Rogers did so spontaneously ; but the others were not altogether satisfied that they were doing

the best for their own interests in clinging to a monarch whose throne was shaken at its foundations.

James, however, perceived nothing of that doubt; the sincerity of Cochrane rendered him insensible to the suspicious protestations of the others, and he accepted them all in good faith.

He personally examined the courier who had brought the despatches, and was well rewarded for his trouble. The courier, although he spoke in a very low voice, and kept his head always bowed, so that his features were never clearly discernible, proved to be a man of superior information, and was able to supplement the contents of the despatches by various items of importance. To his Majesty this was the most satisfactory portion of all his tidings.

“I know the borders well, sire, and although there is a strong body of stout

fellows in Berwick, who will stand for Albany, your Grace's brother, there are not half a dozen of the Border leaders, beside, who will join him, coming as he does under the protection of England."

"What makes you so sure of that, sirrah?" queried James, anxiously.

"I have received assurance from the principal chiefs, sire, and they have already appointed a leader under whose general directions they will act for your Majesty."

"And who is the leader? We should know one who so promptly steps forward to our aid."

"Gordon of Lamington, so please your Majesty."

"Him!" exclaimed the King.

"Him!" echoed Cochrane, startled, and eyeing the courier suspiciously.

"The same," proceeded the man, respectfully; "he has had early tidings of the

proceedings of the Duke of Albany, and has been stirring himself on your Majesty's behalf, so that he is enabled to send you this assurance by me, that when your Grace marches to the Debateable Land you will find him at the head of such an army of Borderers as has never been banded together before."

The King was pleased, although much perplexed, that a man who had appeared to be so uncompromising a traitor should so actively bestir himself in his behalf.

Cochrane was as much disturbed by this intelligence as by that of the despatches; but he made no further comment than to hope that the courier had not been deceived, and that the force under Lamington was not intended to aid rather than oppose Albany.

The suggestion had its effect on James; but he was excited by the conflicting re-

ports of invasion, rebellion, and loyalty, and with a firmness and promptitude which he rarely displayed, he issued directions that all liege vassals of the crown who were capable of bearing arms should assemble at the Borough Moor of Edinburgh; and that an immediate council of the nobles and gentlemen of the realm should be held at the castle of the capital, whither his Majesty would at once proceed to join them.

In the midst of the numerous occupations which these commands and the events of the hour entailed on him, there were two objects which Cochrane endeavoured to compass without delay. The first was to secure the submission of Katherine to the union with himself, in order that he might be able to claim the allegiance of the Janfaries, the Fenwicks, and the Musgraves in the forthcoming contest, and so sustain his

own power, and prove his importance in the eyes of the antagonistic nobles.

The second object was to insure the removal of Lamington, who had been the great stumbling-block in the way of the achievement of one of his most eagerly-pursued desires. At first he had been indifferent to the man, but now he hated him thoroughly, and was resolved to extirpate him at any hazard, for he had arisen at the last moment in the shape of a loyal leader instead of a treacherous conspirator, and had thus given the lie to all the statements and asseverations Cochrane had made to the King.

He had never before found himself so closely matched. Again and again he had seemed to triumph, and still his enemy had baffled him. But this time he should not escape. The men who accompanied the treacherous servant, Muckle Will, had

strict orders not to spare their prey; and they were men who understood such commands perfectly.

So Cochrane turned to the accomplishment of his first object, feeling assured that the second was safe.





CHAPTER X.

VANQUISHED.

“Nae pity was there in his breast,
For war alane he lo’ed ;
His grey een sparkled at the sight
Of plunder, death, and bluid.

“‘What, shall our hearts of steel,’ he said,
‘Bend to a woman’s sang ?
Or can her words our honour quit,
For sic dishonest wrang ?’”

HENRY MACKENZIE.

KATHERINE attended vespers in the royal chapel, and although still cold and hopeless in regard to her own future, she prayed fervently for the safety of her brother—prayed earnestly that heaven might avert the meeting he

desired, and that no ill-fortune might render his death chargeable to Gordon. The terror of such a catastrophe thrilled her with exquisite agony, and to prevent it she would have submitted to any penance or sacrifice.

So deep and absorbing were her prayers that she remained in the chapel long after all others had quitted it. When she rose from her knees, even the priests had retired, either without observing her in the shadowed nook which she had chosen for her devotions, or not desiring to disturb her.

With slow and sorrowful steps she moved towards the doorway, lingering as if she regretted to leave the sacred place which, with its dim lights and solemn silence, so well accorded with her melancholy mood.

She was too much occupied by her own unhappy reflections to observe a hasty

movement as of some one behind her—a sound which would have startled her if she had noticed it, for the place appeared to be deserted by all save herself.

Before the sound was repeated, the door which she was approaching hurriedly opened, and Cochrane presented himself.

She displayed neither surprise nor repugnance, but acknowledged his respectful salutation with quiet courtesy.

“I have been seeking you, madam,” he said, “having somewhat of import, to me, at least, to communicate. Will you permit me to conduct you to your apartments?”

She grew slightly faint at the intimation he made, but she only showed it by a sudden pallor of the cheeks changing to crimson. She maintained her composure, and answered, coldly :

“What your lordship desires to say may be said here.”

“As you will, madam; but you will accord me the favour of being seated.”

And he pointed to a seat in one of the niches in the wall.

“Your lordship will pardon me if I remain standing, and proceed to the matter which has procured me the honour of your attention.”

“You are very cold, Katherine,” he said, regarding her with a mixture of curiosity and chagrin.

“I await the communication your lordship has for me.”

He seemed to thrust aside some faint sentiment of pity which her sad appearance had conjured up in his breast, and he spoke in his usual tone of cold courtesy:

“I regret, madam, that you will not permit me to be your friend, but I will try to prove myself so in spite of your resistance. You have been made aware that his

Majesty has been pleased to sanction the new performance of the marriage ceremony between us."

She inclined her head—that was all the outward sign she made: but her heart throbbed wildly with its alarm and anguish.

"I have come now to inform you that the ceremony must take place within six days," he went on, "and to beg of you to regard me with at least some slight degree less of disfavour, if you cannot yet give me any token of friendship."

"Does the hawk claim friendship with the quarry it pursues?" she asked, coldly, but her heart trembled.

"Devotion and respect are not the characteristics of a bird of prey," he rejoined.

"When they take the form of relentless persecution it is not easy to distinguish

them from those qualities which make a tyrant and an enemy."

"Too earnest kindness may be mistaken for persecution when the mind is resolved to see nothing good in the profferer of it. But I have surely satisfied you of my respect since I have so long left your privacy undisturbed when the opportunity of place and power might have enabled me to press my suit with advantage."

"I own you have shown me the consideration which a hunter shows a caged bird; he does not kill it immediately, because he knows that he can do so whenever the humour takes him, and therefore waits to see how tame it may become."

"That may be as you say; but even now I would not have sought to hasten the union which is still so hateful to you, were it not that events, which drive me and

stronger men before them, render further delay impossible."

"What would you have?" she asked, in that cold uninterested voice, as if the conversation concerned some other person, and not herself.

"Your free submission to the King's command."

"The condemned submit to their fate because it is unavoidable; they cannot be expected to submit freely."

"But yours is not the fate of the condemned. Position and wealth are offered to you with the hand of one who will at least endeavour to insure your happiness. Are you still obstinate? Do you still refuse?"

"Have I the option of refusal?" she said, rousing from her torpor with a flash of scorn. "Oh, sir, it is a poor exertion of your strength over my helpless condition,

to mock me with a hollow show of liberty. You have deprived me of every hope that could have made liberty precious ; you have used all the force of the King's authority and of your own cunning to compel my obedience to your will. Why pretend, then, to consult my inclination, when you know that I must always look upon you with abhorrence as the cause of all my wretchedness ? ”

Cochrane folded his hands and cast his eyes gloomily upon the floor.

“I desired to consult your pleasure, madam,” he said, reflectively, “in the faint hope that time might have softened the harshness of your judgment of me. But your repugnance appears to be now as strong as ever. Will nothing reconcile you to me ? ”

He eyed her from beneath his heavy brows with evident uneasiness as he waited her reply.

“The vulture and the dove may be reconciled, the wolf and the lamb may become mates, but I tell you, my lord, that my regard for you can never change.”

“Think, madam, of the high place you will hold as Countess of Mar,” he urged.

“That which is not desired can give no satisfaction to the possessor.”

“Think, again, of the power you may command to aid your kinsfolk. Think of the wealth which will be yours to satisfy every wish or whim, to help and cheer the forlorn, or to crush your enemy.”

“Why press these arguments upon me, my lord?” she rejoined, weariedly. “When hope is dead, what is there the world holds that can give joy? I have no humour to help others when I am so sick of all that surrounds me. The thought that I might crush my enemy does quicken my pulse, but the only enemy I would crush is yourself.”

He rested his back against the wall, folded his arms, and bowed his head, brooding darkly.

She stood before him, white and passionless as marble, indifferent, it might have seemed, as to the result of his meditations.

"I perceive," he said, at length, with some chagrin, "that I have erred in prosecuting this suit. It would have been wiser to have left you to follow your own course."

"Ah, sir, it would have been well for all of us had you discovered that earlier," she ejaculated, not without a shade of pity for the potent statesman in his admission of weakness, although all his power and influence had failed to elicit any sentiment save that of scorn.

"No man is clear-eyed when his passion stirs him," he commented, moodily. "At first I admired you, and desired the

allegiance of your kinsmen to help me in leaguings the Borderers together as a force to act in my behalf, and to protect me against the envious barons who desire my fall. I own it freely now—it was policy rather than affection which first attracted me to you. But your opposition and the disgrace which your flight on our bridal day seemed to cast on me, roused a passion which blinded me. The desire to win you—ay, win you for your own sake—and the resolution to requite the insult Gordon had put upon me became stronger than all thought of policy. No woman has been sought with devotion so steady as mine.”

“And no woman could have desired it less.”

“Would that I had comprehended that months ago, as I do now. But is it too late to better the ill-fortune which has fallen to us both? Am I so deformed—

so hideous in your eyes—that you must always shrink from me with loathing?”

“I have answered you, my lord.”

“It cannot be that you still hope to mate with Gordon?”

He bent forward, and the mild, almost contrite tone in which he had been speaking, gave place to his ordinary cold, harsh manner, under the suspicion which prompted his inquiry.

“Alas! no; you have deprived me of that hope and all others. My brother’s blood is on his hands, and we have parted.”

“Yet the first use you made of your release from constraint was to endeavour to communicate with him.”

She started in alarm, at once divining that her message had miscarried.

“You know that?”

He bowed with a malicious smile.

“I know, all. Your messenger was

arrested as he quitted you. The knave has consented to betray his master into our hands, and he is already on the way with a strong body of troopers to arrest him."

She staggered back, horrified by the thought that in her desire to save Nicol she had been the instrument of betraying Lamington.

"But you will not be so fell a monster as to take advantage of this treachery!" she exclaimed, piteously.

"Vengeance is pleasant, madam, and you leave nothing else to satisfy me," he answered, drily.

"Beware, my lord, beware," she cried, with passionate emphasis, "for I, too, may be roused to seek a similar satisfaction."

"That I will be prepared to meet," he proceeded, placidly; "in the mean while, I have promised to deliver Gordon to your brother Nicol; if he fails to wreak his will

upon him, then this rebellious gallant falls to my care, and I pledge you all that I have won, he will not escape me a second time, even with your aid."

"*Mercy!*"

It was a cry of utter despair wrung from her agony. She fell upon her knees, wildly extending her hands to him—the man she loathed and scorned—pleading to him for mercy. Nicol and Gordon were to be brought together, were to be forced to combat, both were to fall, and she would be the cause. The terrible discovery that the design she had formed to save them had become the means of destroying both, appalled her. She forgot her hate, forgot that it was the subtle skill of this man which had wrought out her generous design to so dire an issue; she remembered only that he had the power to rescue the victims of her love and of his enmity.

“Mercy, mercy!” she cried, wildly. “For the dear Virgin’s sake, spare them—spare me the thought that I have been the cause of more bloodshed. Oh, merciful Father, look down and move this man’s cruel heart.”

“Calm yourself, madam,” he said, attempting to raise her.

She went on unheeding.

“It was this meeting that has haunted me—it was to avert it—to warn Gordon to avoid it for his soul’s sake and for mine, that I schemed and plotted to communicate with him, and you have turned my scheme into the engine of your vengeance. Oh, you are powerful, sir—how powerful I have never known till now; but show a little mercy to one who lies so helpless at your feet.”

He grasped her hands tightly, and bent over her with excited eyes.

“When you wrote to Gordon, was it only to bid him avoid your brother, and the encounter he seeks?”

“No more.”

“You did not wish to escape to him?”

“No.”

“Were you both free to choose now, would you accept his hand?”

“I dare not.”

“Then rise, madam, for one word from you will assure Lamington’s safety from my pursuit, and will obtain my pledge that Nicol shall never come within bow-shot of him. Nay, you have only to speak that word, and Nicol shall renounce the feud.”

She lifted her affrighted face to the dark visage which hovered over her. Shuddering as with cold, she spoke:

“And that word?”

“Promise that on the day appointed

by his Majesty you will, without demur or opposition, become the Countess of Mar."

She uttered a low, sharp cry of anguish, and would have sunk to the ground had he not sustained her. She was incapable of speech, so fiercely were the emotions of hate and love contending in her breast.

"Why should you hesitate?" he urged; "you have confessed that union with Lamington is impossible; his life, and be-like your brother's, hang on your decision. Will you refuse to save them?"

"Will no other sacrifice content you?" she said, feebly, and still shuddering.

"None."

"You are implacable?"

"As implacable in my love as you can be in your hate. Speak; and bid them live or perish."

"Heaven help me—too many brave

hearts have been already stricken down on my account."

"Say, then, that you will spare those in present danger. I am the suppliant now, and pray you for mercy."

She rose slowly to her feet, a deathly pallor on her face; the cruelty which made her the dispenser of life or death to those she loved was another source of aversion to her relentless persecutor.

"Spare them," she gasped, scarcely able to speak above her breath—"spare them. Do with me as you will."

"You consent?"

"To anything for their sakes. Heaven knows I hold my life too worthless to be balanced against their safety."

"You have saved them," he cried, exultantly; "and trust me, madam, you shall have no reason to relent this determination. Devotion can do much, and my

devotion shall be so earnest, that by-and-by you shall learn to be content even with my presence."

She inclined her head mutely, unable to make any verbal acknowledgment to a prediction at which her whole nature revolted as an impossibility.

She tottered toward the door, and he hastened after her.

"Permit me to support you," he said, attempting to draw her arm within his own.

She snatched her hand away from him, and her eyes gleamed with a resentment which for the moment revived her strength.

"No; do not touch me. On the day appointed claim the fulfilment of my promise; you will find me ready, if you have kept faith with me. But till then do not approach me, or attempt to hold speech with me. Leave me that space to try to

school my hand to take yours without trembling, and to teach my eyes to look on you without horror. You have triumphed. I consent to the sacrifice; but do not you forget the terms of it."

He bowed low, as if in complete submission to her will.

"Two days hence you shall have proof of the safety of Nicol and of Lamington."

A slight and haughty inclination of the head was the only recognition of this pledge. She departed with firm and hasty steps, as if fearing that weakness would assail her before she had got beyond his sight.

Cochrane watched her disappear, smiled quietly, and not altogether contentedly. Then he thoughtfully walked from the chapel.

There was immediately afterwards a movement in a dark recess near the door-

way. A man stepped cautiously forth, looking about him with a somewhat bewildered manner.

It was the courier who only a few hours earlier had delivered the secret despatches.

His hands were clenched, his lips quivered, and his eyes glistened as with some strong excitement. As if to collect his confused thoughts, he halted on the spot, which a moment before had been occupied by Katherine. He pressed his hands on his brow, gazing darkly at the door as if he saw some enemy there.

“It was for my sake,” he muttered, as if striving against some impulse—“it was for my sake. Why should I blame her or attempt to thwart her, by delivering myself up to the malice of my foes? Great heaven, how she suffered! And the wretch was pitiless! Am I also to be pitiless? She was helpless, and it was her love that made

her yield. No, Katherine, no; my lips shall never blame but only bless you. My hand that may never again clasp yours, shall be lifted to save you."

He remained a few minutes to recover his self-possession, fearful lest his agitation should betray his disguise. Then he made his way into the court, where there was a general bustle of soldiers and lackeys, making preparations for the immediate departure of the King for Edinburgh.

Already a number of couriers had been despatched with summonses for the principal nobles and barons to attend the council at the castle. Others were now mounting to set forth on the same errand, and in the midst of the confusion the presence of the strange courier from England was unnoticed.

An hour later the royal *cortége* began its journey to the capital.



CHAPTER XI.

THE CAMP AT LAUDER.

“The beacon lights are blazing bright,
The slogan’s on the blast;
The clansmen muster rapidly,
The fiery cross flies fast.

“Chiefs hurry from their towers of strength,
And vassals from their shields;
For Albyn’s strand’s polluted by
An hundred hostile keels.”

DAVID VEDDER.

THE Border bale-fires, or beacons, were kindled, and the warning flames spread their lurid glare over the country. At Hume Castle the first fire was lighted, and the blaze, broad and fierce, shot up from the beacon height

like a demon that had just escaped thralldom. The single fire intimated that a raid of some sort was expected. Presently two fires were seen, and that intimated that the raid was certain; and by-and-by there were four fires alight, which betokened that the enemy was approaching in great force.

The heights of Soutra Edge and of Edgerton responded to the warning, and carried it nearer to the capital. Then Dunbar and Haddington repeated the signal. Dalkeith immediately followed suit, and spread the tidings throughout the Lothians. The fiery summons was renewed at Edinburgh in a fiercer, higher flame than anywhere else, and speedily every eminence of lowlands and highlands were ablaze. Stalwart yeomen and trusty vassals flocked to the strongholds of their chiefs, and straightway marched to the Borough

Moor, where the national standard had been raised.

The council assembled at Edinburgh had determined upon war; for however much they might be disaffected with the government of James, the barons were prepared to endure it, rather than accept a monarch from the King of England. So they mustered with all their followers at the gathering place, the Earl of Angus, with two thousand followers, being almost the first on the field. The nobles who had most openly declared their discontent during peace were the readiest to advance for the protection of their country in the hour of danger.

The chivalry and strength of the nation had promptly obeyed the summons to arms; every man carried his forty days' provisions in his wallet, and for that space was ready to follow his chief through any peril.

James had the satisfaction of reviewing as brave an army as it had ever fallen to the lot of a Scottish King to lead to battle; and his natural timidity was much comforted and strengthened by that fact.

As became him, the King himself undertook the command of the forces, urged to that course, probably, by Cochrane, as well as by his own desire to prove himself worthy of his subjects in the manner which they would most readily appreciate. It was a happy resolve. The commons saluted him with loyal enthusiasm; and there was a brief glow of martial spirit in his breast as he rode forward on the expedition with the loud plaudits of his people ringing in his ears.

The army advanced as far as Lauder, and there encamped to await some sure tidings of the movements of the enemy, or to give battle on the ground if the oppor-

tunity occurred. Here the forces were augmented by numerous detachments of the Borderers, who flocked to the Scottish standard, bringing to it new strength and valuable intelligence.

When all were counted, the King was gratified to learn that the roll of his army numbered fifty thousand men. This, however, did not induce him to adopt any swift course of action for bringing the campaign to an issue. Although well aware of the impossibility of keeping his forces together as soon as the forty days' store of the men became exhausted, his habitual indecision caused him to linger in the pleasant dale of Lauder, uncertain whether to announce definitely that he would await the approach of the enemy on this vantage ground, or that he would march to the frontier, and check the advance of his brother and Gloucester.

Cochrane determined to take advantage of his halt to complete the arrangements for his marriage with Katherine, which had been interrupted by the pressing occupations of the preparations for the campaign. He had Nicol Janfarie with him as his squire, and kept him almost constantly in his sight. So far he had fulfilled his pledge.

He now summoned the Musgraves and the Fenwicks to attend him as their kinsman and friend; and this summons, supported by the authority of Nicol, and by the proclamation of the forthcoming marriage, obtained a willing and prompt compliance. The Borderers were not loth to acknowledge the kinship of one who had the power to serve them in so many ways.

In this way Cochrane found himself supported by nearly eight hundred Border pricklers, in addition to his own especial

followers, numbering three hundred. This was no inconsiderable force to have attached to his person, and with it he felt himself strong enough to endure complacently all the frowns and scoffs with which the nobles regarded him whenever he appeared in their presence at council or in the field.

The delay at Lauder he resolved to make use of for the purpose of finally binding the borderers to his interests. So, he caused Katherine to be escorted from Linlithgow to a house provided for her in the town, from which she was to be conducted, immediately after her arrival, to the church, where he proposed to have priest and friends in waiting for the performance of the ceremony.

These arrangements were disclosed only to sure friends. His Majesty thought that the diversion of the bridal would be some-

what of a relief from the monotonous iteration of the details of war and rumours of war.

Fenwick, Musgrave, and the other kinsmen of the house of Janfarie were glad that an affair which had given them some concern should be finally disposed of as speedily as possible. Nicol was silent and disposed to be sullen, for he had been obliged, by various specious arguments, to renounce what he still considered a sacred duty; and he was eager for the actual strife to begin, that he might have the opportunity of proving that his motives for withdrawing from the feud were not unworthy of his father's son. He was indifferent to the forthcoming nuptials, except in so far as he was annoyed by the thought of the sacrifice which they had compelled him to make.

But it was sadly different with his

unhappy sister. To her this bridal was no more than the completion of a dismal expiation. She did not falter, however; she was prepared to fulfil her promise to the uttermost.

She obeyed the summons to Lauder without murmur or opposition of any kind. With silent submission she made ready for the journey, and accompanied her guides without the faintest breath of discontent.

She had been too bitterly conscious of the approach of this hour to shrink from it when it came. Day after day she had been reminded of its relentless approach by the gifts of her future husband, who lavished his wealth upon her in the form of endless tokens of his regard, hoping, no doubt, to surprise her into some degree of contentment, or satisfaction even, with the marriage.

Gift after gift reached her hands ; but so far from effecting the desired change in her mood, every one brought her a new pain, for it was another sign to her of the destiny to which she had committed herself irrevocably. The end of it all became less terrible in her eyes than the agonizing suspense with which she watched the advance of the inevitable doom.

Under any other circumstances she might have claimed the protection of the Queen, and she would have obtained it assuredly ; but she had deliberately entered into a compact with the man ; he had fulfilled his share of the bargain, and she dared not retract from her part of it.

So it was that silent and unmurmuring she rode forward to the camp ; but cold as she appeared outwardly, there was a feverish anxiety at her heart for the completion of the ordeal—like one who has

resolved on some desperate act, and who is impatient of all intervention. The overpent heart and brain are relieved when the thundercloud has burst in all its fury.

In this humour she arrived at the camp, and entered the house prepared for her reception. She arrayed herself for the ceremony in the simplest garments of her wardrobe, without making use of one of the gay presents which her bridegroom had forwarded. She looked more like a woman about to perform some melancholy rite than one about to be married. Her maidens remonstrated with her—one boldly, another timidly; but she answered both with a cold smile, in which there was no glimpse of vanity natural to her sex on such an occasion.

“We deck ourselves gaily when our hearts are light, and we go to a merry-making,” she said, in a subdued, hopeless

tone; "but the garb of sorrow best becomes us when we attend a funeral."

The maidens were surprised and almost frightened by this gloomy response, which seemed to forebode some fatal issue to the day's proceedings. They felt that they would have been merrier had it been their bridal morn, but considerately ceased their futile attempts to persuade the lady to change her humour. Katherine seated herself and waited with apparent calmness for the appearance of Cochrane to claim the redemption of her pledge.

There was the hum of busy life around her; detachments of troopers were constantly passing beneath her window, some chanting snatches of warlike songs, others laughing boisterously at some gay jest—all buoyant and full of life, eagerly expectant of the hour when they might win glory or booty according to their especial

whims. None thought of the sanguinary harvest Death was to reap before their hopes could be realized. Every one accounted himself amongst the victors, and all were jubilant in consequence.

The mirthful sounds had no effect upon the lady unless it might be to remind her still more forcibly of the wretched future to which she had resigned herself. These men were going to battle; hope was their beacon, and the turmoil of the contest would drown all consciousness of surrounding horror; at the worst, swift death would relieve them of earthly troubles. But she had no hope to break the sombre shadow which hung over her like a pall; there was no struggle to distract her thoughts—nothing but a cheerless resignation to a sad fate was before her.

Despair rendered her calm and almost insensible to the actual miseries of her

position. She did not repent the sacrifice she had resolved to make ; it had saved the two lives that were more precious to her than all other things on earth, and she was so far content to accept her destiny.

It was with very different sentiments that Sir Robert Cochrane, or the Earl of Mar as he naturally preferred to be designated, prepared for the event of the day. His tent was pitched within call of the royal pavilion ; and of the two habitations the former was so much the more magnificent in its decorations that it might have been easily mistaken for the quarters of the monarch, instead of those of his prime favourite. As has already appeared, Cochrane was a man of elegant tastes, and this was as remarkable on the present as on any former occasion.

The covering of his tent was of fine silk, and even the cords were of the same

material, whilst the furnishing had been effected on a scale of luxury that astounded, as much as it disgusted, the barons and chiefs who had cause enough to detest him, and whose ruder tastes and training induced them to regard his refinements as unworthy of manhood.

But it was still more galling to these discontented spirits to observe his guard of three hundred picked men attired in a splendid livery of white with black facings, which made the garb of some of the gentlemen even look shady and mean. The men, too, were all brawny fellows, armed with partisans, and ready to defend their master to the last extremity.

Cochrane himself was on this day arrayed in a suit of rich velvet, trimmed in the gayest and most costly fashion that a cultivated taste and ingenious mind could direct. A massive chain of gold hung

round his neck, and by his side was suspended a bugle horn, tipped and mounted with the same precious metal, and set with a beryl of unusual size and value.

A suit of finely wrought armour hung on a stand near his couch, and on a velvet cushion lay his helmet, curiously inlaid with gold. It was apparent that whether in the cabinet or in the field, on holidays or working days, the King's favourite attended to the adornment of his person with as much care as a vain and pretty woman.

On this day he was even more careful than usual, for it was to witness the triumph of a project which had more than once threatened to defy all his power and skill. He was gratified exceedingly by his success; gratified as much because failure in anything was unendurable to him, as because he was to win the lady for whom he cer-

tainly entertained a lively esteem now, whatever might have been the original motives of his suit. It was, therefore, in proper temper that he equipped himself to receive his bride.

“I have never failed,” he reflected, smiling as he proceeded with his toilet, assisted by his page. “Fortune has yielded to my skill at every step, and now even the most obstinate of womankind has succumbed to my advances. By my sooth, I am as much elated as if the victory were of a grander kind. The overthrow of Albany and Gloucester would barely give me more content. But that shall follow, for mine is the hand of fortune, and everything prospers that it touches.”

He was indeed a prosperous man, and bold as his words were he could hardly be said to speak vauntingly, for it seemed that in truth success yielded to him in every-

thing. From an obscure origin he had been raised step by step to the highest place next to the throne of his native land. His council was the first sought, and the most readily followed by the King. Wealth had rolled in upon him from all quarters; position had been awarded to him by the monarch he served. If he had been assailed by many enemies, it was the common lot of great ones to be so attacked; hitherto he had thwarted their malice and kept them at bay; and there was no reason to suppose that in the future he would fail to combat their machinations as successfully as before.

He was a prosperous man, and the July sun shone brightly upon him and his prospects, exhilarating him and giving him promise of a still more brilliant morrow.

He was just completing the elaborate toilet he had made when the silken hang-

ings which covered the entrance of the tent were thrust aside, and his squire, Nicol Janfarie, appeared with a somewhat flushed visage.

“What now, Nicol?” he said, observing the expression of his features, although he did not pause in his occupation; “is the enemy upon us, or has your foe shown himself in the camp, that you look so hot?”

“Neither, my lord,” responded Nicol, who had been schooled to give the full title to his future brother-in-law; “but my masters Leonard, Torphichen, and Hommel desire immediate speech with you, having tidings that may appear of more import than either of the events you refer to.”

“Tush! man; they have been bidden to the bridal, and have come in time to attend me, that is all. Let them enter.”

Nicol dropped the hangings and disappeared.

He returned presently, ushering in the friends he had named. The fat master of fence and Terpsichore, Torphichen, was the first to show himself. He was perspiring a good deal, and the gallant attire which he had donned in honour of his friend's nuptials looked somewhat disarranged.

Leonard the smith, tall, strong, and fiery, came next, looking very much out of humour, and impatient with everything, even with the courtesy with which he was received by the chief favourite of his master.

Lastly entered Hommel, the tailor, whose craft might have provided fitter raiment for the occasion, although that which he wore—dull, brown, and rather threadbare—accorded well enough with the melancholy cast of his countenance.

Cochrane surveyed them for an instant curiously, and then burst into a loud laugh.

“Swords and daggers, my lord!” cried Torphichen, becoming, if possible, redder than before, as he bridled up to the earl, playing with the handle of his rapier significantly; “do you laugh at us?”

Cochrane paid as little heed to the wrath of the stout little man as if he had been a bantam pecking at him.

“You will find it no laughing matter before all is done,” growled Leonard, savagely.

“I doubt ye’ll find it’s a matter, my lord, to employ the most serious consideration of us all,” whined the tailor, in a melancholy voice, but with more real self-possession than any of the others.

“Why, what is the mighty matter, gentlemen,” queried Cochrane, still mirthfully inclined, “that upsets you, just as we are about to proceed to the kirk?”

“The matter looks bad for us, and,

mayhap, for our master too," said Leonard, "and it is something of your making."

"Ay, marry, all of your making," blustered Torphichen, "and affronts uncountable have been put on us as we passed through the camp, for no better reason than that you have chosen to brave the lords by flaunting your titles and favours in their teeth."

Cochrane turned quietly to Hommel.

"Will you expound to me what has so disturbed the humour of our friends? for by my word you seem the only one who can hold the rein of your passion."

"It means, my lord," answered the tailor, humbly, "that there is some villainous complot astir, and that we, the friends and servants of his Majesty, are the objects of its malice."

"That is nothing new, for we have been the object of villainous designs ever since

our master showed that he valued our service."

"True, and therefore we have the more cause for alarm as to what may be the upshot of the present conspiracy, when we are surrounded by all our enemies and their forces," proceeded Hommel, deliberately enough, notwithstanding the fear under which he laboured.

"We have thrust our heads into the tiger's jaws, and he means to snap them off, if he can," muttered the smith.

"We should never have been here in the midst of their desperadoes, who will make no more ado of cutting us into mincemeat than they would of emptying a quaich of ale," grumbled Torphichen.

"His Majesty will protect us," said Cochrane.

"I' faith, it will be well if he can protect himself," muttered Leonard; "but he can do nothing for us."

“Then we can defend ourselves.”

“We’ll get the worst of that, with a curse upon them,” cried the master of fence. “I am not the one to cry off from any fair field ; but here is a shamble, and we are the lambs to be slaughtered. Retreat, speedy and secret, is our only chance.”

“Retreat !” cried Cochrane, scornfully ; “you mean desertion of our master, like base churls, who have neither courage nor gratitude. No, by my soul, fly who will, I budge not a step if the whole army rose against my single hand.”

“Fine words, my master, and I could speak as fine were I so minded,” rejoined Torphichen, gasping as if the atmosphere were stifling him ; “but no man bares his throat willingly to the assassin’s knife.”

“If your lordship will listen to me, you shall know whence springs the alarm that

makes us debate whether or no it be wise to remain longer in the camp," said Hommel.

"Say it, man, in the devil's name, for it is that I have been trying to discover from you," cried Cochrane, with some show of impatience.

"Then this is it: At midnight there came into the camp a troop of Borderers, two thousand strong at least."

"So much I know, and count it the better for our master's cause."

"Ay, but I scarce think you can know that these men acknowledge Gordon of Lamington as their friend and leader."

Cochrane started, glared wildly at the speaker, and then controlling himself, he said, with forced calmness :

"Proceed. How is it you know them to be his followers?"

"I did not say his followers; but men

pledged to support him against you, and that is much the same. I made it my business to inquire into the affair with what cunning I could, so that no alarm or offence might be stirred by my curiosity, and I learned that Lamington had accompanied them to the camp, and only awaited an opportunity to obtain free speech with his Majesty to declare himself openly."

The Earl of Mar smiled, as if relieved.

"He will not speedily declare himself, then, if he waits for that," he said, significantly.

"Ay, but, my lord, you have not heard all. Soon thereafter a secret council of the nobles and chiefs—most of whom are known to be your foes, and take no trouble to hide it—was convened in the kirk."

"Have you learned anything of their resolutions?"

“Nothing; but the council is still sitting with Angus and Lord Gray as presidents; and as the morning advanced, every man of note in the camp has hastened to join them.”

“My life upon it, I shall know the purpose of their conclave before the day is an hour older.”

“Swords and daggers!” ejaculated Torphichen, “if your lordship is minded to play rashly with your life, so will not I for the best Toledo that ever was tempered.”

“Remain you with his Majesty, then, or crawl to some kennel and hide yourself until the storm be over; but I shall not fail to remember how you have borne yourself to-day.”

“I am no braggart and no coward either,” blustered the little man, but losing much of his rubicund tint as he spoke; “but I value my neck, although I can

bear myself in a fair field as well as the prettiest man among you."

Cochrane turned from him with some show of contempt, which the other did not resent, although he looked furious enough.

"Go you, Leonard, with fifty men, and let Nicol Janfarie, Musgrave, and Fenwick, with their followers, accompany you and conduct my bride to the kirk, where you will find me with the priest ready to proceed with the ceremony. You, Hommel, seek Rodgers and the rest of our friends, and remain near the King, that you may be ready to give him timely warning and assistance in the event of any danger."

"Zounds! I too will stay by his Majesty," interpolated Torphichen, "that he may have a trusty hand to protect him to the last."

The directions which Cochrane issued with the decisive coolness characteristic of him in emergency, were obeyed promptly; every one seeming to be reconciled to the belief that fidelity would be the most advantageous policy in the end.

His lordship remained alone, and the shadow on his visage intimated that his meditations produced many doubts as to the propriety of the next step he was to take. But he roused himself.

“The sooner my weakness or power is proved the better,” he muttered.

He passed from the tent, and mounted a gaily-caparisoned horse, which an attendant held in readiness for him. The page carried his helmet, and a squire bore the rest of his armour, as if he had been going forth to battle instead of to his bridal.

His own gallant array and that of the three hundred men who attended him in their bright liveries, and with polished arms glittering in the sunlight, presented an imposing appearance.

The camp was astir; the soldiers were actively engaged furbishing up their arms, preparing their noontide meal, or spending their leisure in games of dice and in athletic contests, which enabled them to display their prowess in friendly rivalry. There was a constant hum, as of a great city—mingled with the clank of arms, and the sound of horses galloping to and fro, their panoplies rattling like many sheep-bells. Everywhere bustle and activity of one sort or other prevailed.

But as the brilliant cavalcade of the Earl of Mar passed along, every one paused in his occupation to stare at the procession,

and to exchange observations of admiration or contempt. His lordship rode proudly forward, without deigning to observe the friendly or unfriendly regards which marked his progress.





CHAPTER XII.

THE COUNCIL IN LAUDER KIRK.

“Lang hast thou harried our peacefu’ haulds,
And fattened upon our waes, I trow;
But noo we hae gotten thee in the faulds
O’ thine ain treachery, fast enow.”

Evandale.

THE kirk stood on the north side of the town, and close to the massive peel or tower called Lauder Fort, which has been since transformed into Thirlestane Castle. The place chosen for the assembly of the disaffected barons and gentlemen was sufficiently retired from the camp to ensure their lordships against any untimely interruption,

and the massive walls and doors secured them from eavesdroppers.

Their deliberations chiefly concerned the immediate prospects of the war, and the measures adopted by his Majesty for repelling the invasion. The present inactivity was unanimously condemned as fatal policy; and it was attributed to the same influence which their lordships held accountable for all the current ills of the State—the influence of Cochrane and his companions on the mind of the King.

The Abbot Panther, who in disguise had made his way into the camp, and placed himself under the protection of Angus, supplied them with important tidings as to the movements and purposes of the English army; and he urged the council to adopt on the instant such measures as would finally relieve the country of the causes of misgovernment.

He averred that the opportunity was offered to them now of displacing the incompetent and knavish adviser of the King, and that if it were missed they deserved to groan under the oppression which had banished so many of them from their places at the court and at the councils of the State.

The assembly was stirred by this address, and one after another of those present cited instances of the tyranny, corruption and maladministration of justice exercised by the minions of the King. Several hours were occupied by these revelations, and during that time Sir Robert Douglas, of Loch Leven, who kept the door, admitted new comers who desired to share in the council, until the gathering crowded the kirk.

Throughout it all there was one man who stood near the doorway, with arms

folded on his breast, bonnet drawn low on his brow, and his long cloak concealing his person. He had been one of the first to enter the place; he had listened intently to all that passed; but he had not moved or attempted in any way to join in the debate.

He was one who had suffered the worst of wrongs, and the wounds they had inflicted were too deep and fresh for words to give him any relief. He waited the moment of action.

The interest which the proceedings excited in every breast prevented the lapse of time being noted; and hours after the brief darkness of the summer night had given place to sunshine the discussion continued; for although all were clear as to the evil and the necessity of removing it, they could not so readily agree as to the means by which it was to be removed.

“With your leaves, my lords,” said Lord Gray, “I will read you a fable which may help to solve the difficulty in which we now find ourselves placed: There was once a discreet community of mice sorely fashed by the steady persecution of their race by a monstrous big cat. A council of the mice was held—just as it might be here—and after much debate it was agreed that a bell should be hung round the enemy’s neck, in order that they might have timely warning of his approach. The measure was an admirable one, as your lordships can understand, and all were agreed upon its expediency. But, unfortunately, it failed to serve the mice, for not one of them could be found who was bold enough to put the measure in force, and tie the bell to the cat’s neck. That is the fable, my lords. I leave you to apply the moral.”

There was profound silence for a few

seconds ; and then the Earl of Angus stood up, his tall form seeming to tower above all others more than usual, and his stern visage seeming to become grim under the passion which moved him.

“I read your moral, my lord,” he said in a loud, resolute tone : “and that what we purpose may not lack execution, I am he who will bell the cat.”

There was a low murmur of satisfaction throughout the assembly, and from that time forth Douglas became known by the cognomen—Bell-the-cat.

The murmur had scarcely subsided when the door was rudely shaken by the furious blows of some one impatient to obtain entrance.

“Who is there ?” demanded Sir Robert Douglas.

“It is I, the Earl of Mar,” was the answer ; and a thrill of astonishment passed through the assembly.

“The fool runs his head into the noose right freely,” exclaimed Angus, pressing forward to the entrance; “admit him.”

At the same time the man who had remained so long motionless sprang to the side of Angus.

The door was opened, and Cochrane, surrounded by his followers, was seen without.

“I am given to understand that there is a council holding here,” he said, haughtily; “and I have come hither to know its purport, and to give my voice to its decisions with what advantage may be for his Majesty’s welfare.”

“Enter,” said Angus, grimly.

Cochrane boldly crossed the threshold, and the door was immediately closed on his followers.

Angus thereupon snatched the massive gold chain from the courtier’s neck.

“A halter will suit you better, my lord,” he said, mockingly.

Sir Robert Douglas snatched the bugle horn from the astonished favourite’s side.

“You have been a hunter of mischief over long,” exclaimed the assailant, “and you have ridden to your own doom at last.”

“Is this jest or earnest, my lords?” cried Cochrane, starting back and regarding his opponents indignantly.

“It is sad earnest, as you shall find,” retorted Angus: “you and your accomplices have too long abused the confidence of the King, corrupted his government, and betrayed his trust. But now, you and your fellows shall have the fitting reward of the service you have done the country.”

“If that be your intent, my lords, you shall not find me yield tamely to your treachery,” answered Cochrane, boldly.

“Ho! Leonard, Janfarie, Musgrave, Fenwick, to the rescue.”

Drawing his sword, he made a violent effort to reach the door in order to open it. But a dozen swords were instantly opposed to him, and he must have been beaten down at once had not help come from an unexpected quarter.

The man who had hastened to the side of Angus when it became known that Cochrane approached, now dropped his cloak, and revealed the person of Lamington.

“I claim your lordship’s pledge,” he cried, firmly; “this wolf is my prey.”

“Hold your hands, gentlemen,” shouted Angus, in obedience to the demand made on him.

The command was obeyed, and before Cochrane could recover breath from the fierce exertion he had made to defend him-

self, Lamington grasped his arm. "Turn to me, Robert Cochrane, and if your arm does not fail you at sight of one you have so bitterly wronged, endeavour to win an honourable death at my hand."

"You here—curses upon you!" cried the incensed man, who now indeed began to feel that he had been trapped beyond help; "this is your doing. But I thank you for this one chance of satisfying my hate. On guard."

He struck at him so suddenly, and with such fury, that it was only by an exertion of extraordinary agility that Lamington avoided the stroke. His sword was ready to prevent a repetition of the movement.

Cochrane gnashed his teeth with rage; but his eye met that of his opponent with a cold, deadly glitter, that betokened perfect presence of mind.

"Stand back, gentlemen," cried Gordon,

whilst he kept his eye fixed on his foe, and the weapons crossed, "mine is the first score to be settled with this knave. He has traduced me to the King; he has declared me rebel and traitor, and condemned me to the gallows; but more villainous than all beside, he has deprived me of a treasure that was of little worth to him and that was life itself to me."

As if acknowledging the superior claim of Gordon, to prove his truth upon the body of his maligner, all drew back as far as the walls would permit, leaving a clear space for the combatants.

Cochrane saw in this movement the possibility of reaching the door before he could be again surrounded; and he therefore hastened the issue of the conflict by the rapidity and fury of his attack.

All the skill he possessed in the use of his weapon—and it was considerable—was

quickenèd by the knowledge that everything depended on his present address. With a desperate velocity his sword played round that of his antagonist, and he availed himself of every trick of fence to gain a speedy and decisive victory. He fancied that he had learned the secret of Gordon's play in the encounter at the Dumfries hostelry, and he put that knowledge to the best advantage.

But either he had misapprehended the lesson, or Lamington, also remembering the incident, adopted new tactics; for every thrust, parry, and feint was warded with singular dexterity, and returned so swiftly that it would have been impossible to say which was the best swordsman.

The spectators looked on in silence and gradually became excited by the contest, which was sustained with equal address and equal animosity by both combatants.

The faces of the combatants were at white heat with passion; and yet there was a certain coolness on both sides which gave no advantage to either. At length Cochrane, imagining that he felt the arm of his opponent weakening, made a desperate lunge at his breast. But the weakness had been a feint: the lunge was deftly parried, and Gordon pierced the sword-wrist of his foe, so that the weapon dropped instantly from the powerless hand.

Without a pause, and without uttering a sound or changing expression to indicate the pain he endured, Cochrane with his left hand whipped his poniard from his sheath and sprung at Gordon's neck before the latter could recover his weapon in time to follow up his success.

He, however, warded the blow of the poniard with his arm, griped the assailant

by the throat, and hurled him violently to the ground.

Cochrane was momentarily stunned by the fall; Gordon's foot planted on his breast rendered it impossible for him to rise, and Gordon's sword-point, resting on his throat, threatened to pierce his neck and pinion him to the floor at the slightest movement he might make to renew the conflict.

A murmur of satisfaction and sundry cries of congratulation greeted the victor. There was not one of those who had so intently watched the progress of the close-balanced combat who did not draw a breath of relief in beholding the triumph of him whose cause they had deemed just, and whose honour they now believed to be vindicated beyond doubt.

“Now, Cochrane, for your soul's sake,” cried Gordon, “confess the treachery you

have practised upon me—confess the wrong you have done me, and for which there is no remedy. Confess, and win some mercy for your black soul.”

“Strike, fool!” answered the fallen man, with bitter scorn—“strike, and be content with your victory, for you get no word from me but that of hate and contempt.”

“It is too brave an end for such as you.”

“So think we,” interrupted Angus, striking up Lamington’s sword. “You have proved your truth on his foul body; now let the gallows have its due.”

At a sign from the earl, Sir Robert Douglas and another lifted Cochrane from the ground and held him prisoner between them.

He fixed his eyes on Angus, with the haughty glance of one who knows that he is powerless, but will not show any submission.

“This is like your lordship’s bravery,” he said, mockingly; “you can revile the defenceless, knowing that you are secure from his vengeance. Had I been wiser you should never have fled from Linlithgow or lived to show me this disgrace.”

“Faugh! you false loon; your taunts shall not move me to sully my fingers with you,” said the earl, contemptuously.

“Are you all of his mind, my lords?” proceeded Cochrane, turning to the assembly; “remember, I wear an earl’s spurs, and I claim from you the death of a gentleman.”

“Oho! you would ride the beggar’s high horse, most worshipful Earl of Mar,” cried Angus, “you would play the noble, and hold your head on a level with the best gentlemen of the land? By St. Andrew, since you have mounted the horse, you shall have the beggar’s ride—to the foul

fiend, your master. The spurs shall be struck from your heels by the common hangman, and your head shall have the honour it merits by being exalted above your comrades on the scaffold."

The now impotent favourite saw that it was useless to strive further against the determination of his powerful enemies. He quietly took a silk handkerchief from his pocket and began to bind it round his wounded wrist.

A piece of dirty rope that seemed to have been lying in the gutter of some stable was brought to bind his hands. At sight of it he drew back.

"At least your malice, sirs, will permit me the poor favour of a silken cord," he said bitterly; "you cannot refuse to spare me the indignity of hanging in filthy hemp when you may accommodate me with one of the silken cords which you will find attached to my pavilion."

Several laughed outright at this request, and Sir Robert Douglas proceeded with new zest to fasten his hands behind him with the despised hemp.

It was Angus who answered :

“You shall have a tether of horsehair to hang in, that we may the better mark our disdain for you and your ways.”

Cochrane shrugged his shoulders as he might have done in happier circumstances at the hopeless vulgarity of a boor.

“One last request permit me to make,” he said with mocking courtesy. “A lady is on her way hither in expectation of wedding with me to-day. Will you so far consider her pleasure as to prevent her witnessing my disgrace?”

“The dame that could wed with you will be the merrier for the sight, if she esteem you rightly,” retorted the uncompromising Angus ; and then addressing the council :

“Pronounce judgment now, my lords, that we may save time and finish our work speedily.”

“Death to him and his accomplices at the hands of the common hangman!” was the unanimous verdict pronounced, without any further form of trial.

It was then arranged that Cochrane should be kept prisoner in the kirk until his associates were secured. In the meanwhile, his followers were ordered back to their quarters by the Earl of Angus; and the men, knowing nothing of what had transpired, and their master not making any sign to countermand them, retired accordingly.

Sir Robert Douglas was entrusted with the care of the prisoner, and a thousand troopers were speedily placed on guard round the kirk to frustrate any attempt at rescue. When these precautions had been

taken, a number of men were despatched to erect scaffolds on the bridge of Lauder, whilst Angus, Lord Gray, and other noblemen proceeded to the King's pavilion for the purpose of arresting the other favourites.





CHAPTER XIII.

THE MEETING IN THE TENT.

“Nor wealth, nor grandeur, power could have
My faithful heart to shake;
For thee it beat, Oh much-loved boy,
For thee it now doth break.

“Why did thy wrathful rival think
His sword could us disjoin?
Did he not know that Love had made
My life but one with thine?”

The Dowy Den.

HAVING seen his vanquished foe
securely bound, Gordon snatched
up his cloak and quitted the kirk,
accompanied by the Abbot Panther. The
latter wore the expression of one who is
satisfied with a victory for which he has

been long struggling; but Gordon was as gloomy as if he came from defeat rather than conquest. He had been wounded in several places by his antagonist; but the wounds gave him no concern; they had nothing to do with the sorrow which oppressed him.

“You will hasten forward,” he said presently to his friend, “and give her assurance that she is saved from the wretched union which would have been forced upon her but for the fortune of to-day?”

“I will tell her that you have saved her, and she will thank me for the tidings,” rejoined Panther; “but she would thank me still more if I could present the champion to her.”

“No—that is impossible. Do not try to persuade me, Panther, for heaven knows my own desire to touch her hand again, and

to look into her eyes, makes my resolution weak enough."

"The resolution should never have been taken."

"It is her will that we should never meet again," continued Lamington, mournfully, "and I cannot marvel at it. There is no mending the evil fortune that parts us: we can only suffer. Meeting only adds to our misery by the bitterer sense which presence gives of the black gulf between us. I wish to spare her and myself so far as may be, and therefore must not meet her. Tell her this, if you find occasion; and say, too, that Nicol is safe from me."

"I cannot urge you more than I have done on this matter," said the Abbot, gravely; "I respect the motives which actuate the lady and yourself; but Churchman as I am, the fate of her brother does

not seem to me to merit such penance from you."

"If *we* could only think so! But no, I dare not, must not think of it."

"Forget it, then, if you can. I will do your errand, and, in faith, it must be done speedily, for there is need that I should hasten to the King to see that he is used with the respect our friends are apt to forget in their wrath."

"You will find me in the camp when you need me."

They had by this time come up with a small troop of Borderers, who appeared to have been waiting for them. The Abbot and Gordon mounted the horses which were held in readiness, and the former rode towards the town.

Lamington having given some brief instructions to his men, slowly followed the Abbot at a distance.

The party sent to conduct the bride to the kirk had been unexpectedly delayed. When Nicol entered the chamber in which his sister waited for him, she informed him that a little while before his arrival a missive had been received by her, intimating that she was not to quit the house on any persuasion until a second message was delivered. The missive had been forwarded by Lamington, but that she did not make known to her brother, whom, under various pretences, she detained in the room with her, fearing that a collision might take place if he should see Gordon, in spite of his reluctant promise to renounce the feud.

Leonard imagined that the instructions to tarry the coming of further intelligence had been sent by Cochrane; and being aware that there was more than probability of sundry unpleasant interruptions to the

proposed ceremony, he was content to abide in the town and refresh himself at the hostelry. In this occupation Musgrave and Fenwick readily joined him.

Thus the party remained until the Abbot galloped up the street. Leonard sallied forth to discover the purpose of the rider.

“There will be no bridal to-day, my masters,” cried his lordship, dismounting : “wherefore you may hie back to the camp when you please.”

“No bridal !” ejaculated Leonard. “Why, what in the name of Vulcan does that mean ?”

“Ride to the kirk and learn for yourself,” was the curt response of the Abbot, as he entered the house in search of Katherine.

“That will I, and right speedily,” shouted the smith, “for by your looks, my master, there is an iron hot that may need a sledge hammer to shape it.”

Valiantly mounting his horse, and resolved to give his comrade, Cochrane, what help he might need, Leonard summoned his men to follow, and galloped to the kirk. There he was assailed by the troops left in charge, and despite the desperation with which he defended himself, he was captured, pinioned, and thrown down beside his associate to await execution.

When Panther appeared before Katherine she rose with a startled and somewhat bewildered expression to meet him.

“You did not count on seeing me here, daughter,” he said, taking her hands kindly; “but I bring tidings that should make me welcome.”

“You are so always, father,” she replied, agitatedly, and marvelling what might be the nature of his tidings.

“But more than ever now; for I have come to tell you that Robert Cochrane will

never claim your hand, or any woman's. He is doomed, and you are free."

"I am free?" she echoed, as if scarcely comprehending the full meaning of the words.

"Then I am free too," muttered Nicol; and he swiftly passed from the chamber unobserved.

The tent of Lamington had been pitched on the outskirts of the camp, as he had been amongst the latest arrivals. The position was besides favourable to his purpose of keeping his presence as secret as possible until after he had settled his affairs with Cochrane.

His vengeance was now accomplished: his task was completed. Katherine was free to choose her own course, and he had nothing more that he cared to live for. The future was desolate to him, for every

motive of energy seemed suddenly to have been withdrawn.

He felt himself as weak as he was hopeless, and he wearied for the din of war that it might rouse him from his state of enervation, if it were for no better end than to fall speedily in the vanguard of the army. The thought of his ambition to restore the credit of his father's name only produced a melancholy smile at the futility of man's purposes.

In this misanthropical humour, he repaired to his tent as soon as he had seen the Abbot enter the house occupied by Katherine, and threw himself on the pile of heather which served him as a couch, feeling utterly exhausted by the emotions and events of the day. But it was with no thought or hope of sleep that he had lain down; it was with the feeling of one who yields himself up to his

despair, believing that to strive against it is useless.

The entrance of some one awakened him from the species of lethargy into which he had fallen.

He looked up and recognized Nicol Janfarie.

The countenance of the youth was flushed with excitement, and he appeared to preserve a calm bearing only by the greatest effort of his will.

Gordon rose slowly, watching Nicol's face with wistful eyes, whilst he waited for him to speak. But Nicol seemed as slow to begin the conversation as he had been eager to seek the interview.

"You know why I am here?" he said, at length, excitedly, and yet with some respect.

"I cannot know until you have acquainted me," answered Lamington in a

low voice that almost trembled, for he had no difficulty in divining the purpose of the visit from the tone in which the inquiry was made.

Nicol gazed at him, frowning; and then with some agitation :

“Gordon, I believe you to be an honest man, in spite of all that has been said to your discredit, and in spite of all the ill that you have done us.”

Lamington inclined his head.

Nicol went on with growing warmth.

“Answer me, then, as a true man and I will be guided by your answer. If you stood face to face with the man who was the cause of your father’s fall, if you stood face to face with the man whose hand had stricken your brother to the earth, what would you do?”

Lamington’s head was bowed, his hands were clasped, but he did not answer.

“You will not refuse to satisfy me,” cried Nicol, with increasing excitement; “say, would you permit the tears, the prayers—the agony even, of a silly woman to tether your arm? Would you permit that man to go scathless from your presence?”

A pause, and then the response was given, as if wrung from him by some irresistible power :

“No.”

“You would claim from him life for life—you would compel him to yield you his heart’s blood, or you would give yours in striving for it? Would you not do that?”

“I would,” he replied in the same forced manner as the first response.

“I thank you, Gordon, for this answer, and I would that I might have taken your hand as a friend’s, not a foe’s. Now you know why I am here.”

“Nicol, this cannot be.”

“And I tell you, Gordon, that this must be, according to your own showing. But more than that, the pangs of shame which I have endured—the sharp stings of remorse with which I have been whipped almost to frenzy since Robert Cochrane drew from me the promise to renounce the feud as the only means by which he could make sure of Katherine’s hand, and as the only means by which he could make sure of your destruction—all these have proved to me that this must be.”

“Listen to me, Janfarie,” said Lamington, calmly. “I own that something of the blame of your father’s fall may be due to me, but nothing of your brother’s. He compelled me to defend my life, and in return I tried to save his.”

“But it was by your hand he fell, nevertheless,” was the dogged comment.

“My hand, unhappily, but not my will.

I cannot hope to alter your view of that matter, however, and will not seek to defend myself further. But I have something still to say concerning yourself."

"You waste words. I am resolved, and there is no power can make me falter again."

"But you must hear me all the same. I was entrusted with certain despatches to deliver to his Majesty, and in the disguise of a courier I obtained admission to the palace at Linlithgow. Desiring to see your sister, desiring perhaps to have speech with her, although that was forbidden to me, I followed her to the chapel, and there accident made me the hearer of all that passed between her and Cochrane when she gave her consent to be his wife."

"What of that?"

"Everything, for it enabled me to comprehend the cruel anguish with which she

gave that consent; it enabled me to understand that she yielded herself to a fate which appeared to her worse than death, only that she might save your life and mine. I devoted myself then to rescue her from the sacrifice to which she had pledged herself, and I resolved that no taunt, no threat should ever move me to lift a finger against you."

"You spared her the sacrifice, and by the same means you gave me liberty to pursue my vengeance. By my soul, I thank you for her sake and my own."

"Do what you will, the memory of her sorrow will keep me constant to my resolve."

"What, will you bear to have your knighthood shamed with the brand of coward?"

Gordon smiled at the threat, as he might have done at the petty fury of an indulged child.

“That will not affect me, for none who know me will doubt my courage.”

“If words cannot move you, then this must,” cried Nicol, and struck him on the brow with his glove.

Gordon’s face crimsoned, and then grew pale, but he kept his hands tightly clasped, and made no movement to resent the indignity.

“Even that I can endure for her sake,” he said composedly.

Nicol was astounded by his imperturbability; and then, with furious haste, he drew his sword.

“Dog!—you will at least defend yourself.”

“No. If it is your will, strike; but you will strike a defenceless man.”

Nicol raised his weapon as if about to take him at his word, and immediately checked himself.

“I am no cut-throat,” he said, hoarsely ;
“I cannot do that ; but I will whip you
with my belt from your own pavilion, and
through the midst of our Border lads. If
you submit to that degradation, then I will
own you are unworthy of better treat-
ment.”

He had unfastened his belt as he spoke,
and twisting it once round his hand, he
advanced to strike.

But that was too much. Gordon sud-
denly grasped Nicol’s arms and pinioned
them to his side.

“If you wish to be my executioner,” he
said, sternly, “you have the opportunity.
I give it you freely ; but you shall not
degrade me further. See now how help-
less you are in my grasp ; you can feel how
easy it would be for me to return the blow
that any other would have paid for with
his life. But I hold you harmless. There,

take your sword, and take your satisfaction if you are so minded."

He released him, and stood calmly awaiting the result.

Nicol snatched up his sword, and, blind with passion, cried fiercely—

"Then, by my father's hand, since there is no nobler course left to me, this shall atone for all."

He would have rushed on his defenceless foe, but whilst he had been speaking, Katherine had hurriedly entered the tent, and now flung herself on his breast, staying him.

At the same time a dog sprang into the place, and capered around Lamington, striving to lick his hands, and planting his fore paws on the knight's shoulders, as if desirous of embracing him, whining with delight the while. It was Stark, and at the entrance stood Stark's master,

Muckle Will, who seemed to have accompanied the lady, and who now appeared to be hesitating whether or not he should advance. His expression was that of sheepish awkwardness, as if conscious that he had been guilty of some grave offence; and yet there was a twinkle of drollery in his honest eyes which did not quite accord with the gravity of the occasion.

Nicol was for an instant confused by the appearance of his sister; but the next instant he made fierce efforts to unclasp her arms from his neck, and to thrust her from him.

“Stand aside, Kate,” he cried, hotly, “and quit the place. You are not wanted here—your presence only retards the work I have to do.”

“It is evil work, and you shall not do it,” she exclaimed, resolutely: “it is

murder that you were about to do, and the shame of it would cling to your life for ever, turning your high intents to meanest ends."

"It is justice I am about to render to the dead," retorted the brother.

"No—not justice, but dishonour to their name, for which every true man of the Border will scorn you."

"You think to save him by this," he said, savagely, "but I know your purpose, and can esteem your words at their proper worth. Let go your hold, for by the sacred Cross you shall not baulk me. I have faltered too long for your sake already; but from this hour I cast you from me as no kin or friend of mine. It is you who bring dishonour on our name, but I will try to retrieve its credit."

He violently disengaged her hands and flung her from him.

“Nicol!—forbear,” she cried, wildly, striving to seize him again.

But he held her aloof with his left arm, whilst raising his weapon he looked to Gordon.

“Now, let him defend himself, or on his own head be the issue,” he said, firmly.

Lamington did not move.

Muckle Will, as if only then comprehending the position of affairs, threw down his bonnet, and making two strides, confronted the fiery youth.

“Od, man, gin ye’re sae bad for some ane to fecht wi’, try me?” exclaimed Will, as if with the good-natured desire to satisfy the humour of a child.

“Out of the way, fool.”

“No siccan a gowk as I look like, it may be; and gin ye would jist hearken what I hae gotten to say, and what a friend o’ mine has gotten to say, ye would, may be,

change your notion about this hurly-burly," answered Will, undaunted by the dangerous proximity of the sword's point to his breast.

Nicol glared at the huge form of the man, astounded by the hardihood of his interference in such a quarrel, and astounded too by the complaisance with which it was done.

Katherine still held her brother's hand, and, glad of any interruption which might delay the strife and give his passion time to abate, she said, eagerly :

"Let him speak, Nicol. He comes to tell you how Richard fell, and to give you his last commands."

At the reference to his brother, Nicol glanced inquiringly at her, and at Muckle Will; then slowly lowering his weapon, he said huskily :

"If that be true I will listen to him."

Lamington also was startled by the allusion, for it inspired the hope that in his last moments the master of Janfarie had done him justice by declaring him innocent of his death.

“How do you know aught of Richard Janfarie?” he cried, turning hastily to Will; “and how have you come here at this moment?”

“How hae I come here? To tell you the truth, sir, I hae come to betray ye into the hands o’ some folk that are unco anxious to chap off your honour’s head,” rejoined Will, grinning.

“Betray me? This is no time for jesting, sirrah.”

“But it’s nae jest ava, saving your presence. Ye see when I got the letter frae the lady that ye nae doubt ken aboot, Stark and me got into a deeficulty. His lordship, the Earl o’ Mar, was like to

thrapple me in order to get a sight o' the bit letter, but Stark chowed it a' to pieces. Syne his lordship swore he would gie me a taste o' thae iron boots and thrumbikins, that he said gart honest folk wha wanted to keep their ain council chatter like magpies, unless I showed him where ye were to be found. I didna care to try thae things he spoke aboot, sae I scarted my pow and considered. Weel, it came into my head, some gate, that the best thing to do was jist to agree wi' his lordship and betray your honour."

"What, you play traitor to me?"

"Od, man, what else could I do? I promised to lead the earl's billies to where they might gripe ye, and they are outbye, enoo, waiting to get a haud o' ye."

Lamington seized his hunting-horn, and was about to sound it when Will stopped him.

“But ye needna fash to blaw your horn, for there are twa or three Border chieles yonder wham I tauld the nature o’ our errand to, and they hae gotten the earl’s billies penned thegither like sheep, and winna let them steer a foot without your leave.”

Gordon laid down his bugle, for he began to see the stratagem by which his follower had outwitted Cochrane’s satellites.

“What is the meaning of this, Will?” he queried, reconciled; “and what has it to do with Richard Janfarie?”

“Weel, sir, Stark and me agreed to betray ye to save our ain skins, but we didna want to do it jist at a minute when it mightna hae been ower and aboon agreeable to ye. Sae we took a lang road about in search o’ ye, and the mair the deils threatened to poniard me and quarter me,

the mair I led them out o' the right road. At last we put up at the hospice St. Margaret, and the villains were gaun to thrapple me there and then for no bringing them sooner to the journey's end, though I had tauld them that it was impossible for me to say where ye was. But jist when they were on the point o' making a preen-cushion of my body wi' their swords, wha should step in but a strapping chiel o' the Borders, and commanded them to haud their hands."

"You have said nothing of my brother yet," interrupted Nicol, impatiently.

"Hoots, man, can ye no gie a body time to say his say?" replied Will, contentedly. "Weel, the dacent sowl wha came to my help was ken'd by the officer of the billies that had me in charge, and he did just whatever my friend direckit. When the swords were put up, my friend said to me

that I maun take him without delay to the place where Gordon of Lamington was to be found, as he had a particular message to gie him frae Richard Janfarie."

"Where is the man?" cried Gordon.

"He's no' far awa'. But it was awhile afore I was satisfied that he had an honest purpose in wanting to see ye. Hows'ever he satisfied me at last, and I brought them a' to Lauder. In the toon I heard that her ladyship had arrived afore us, and as my friend wanted her to be present when he met your honour, I gaed and brought her here."

"Where is the man?" repeated Gordon.

"I'll fetch him to ye in a minute."

And whilst the others stood in mute suspense, Muckle Will quitted the tent.

The excited anticipations with which they awaited the revelation about to be made, rendered the brief interval of Will's

absence painful. But the suspense was not protracted, for he reappeared in a few minutes, and there was a simultaneous exclamation of surprise and joy uttered by the three.

The cause of the cry was Muckle Will's companion—a tall man and a youthful one, but so enfeebled by sickness, that he was obliged to lean heavily on his stalwart comrade's arm. His visage was so pallid and haggard, that it was like the face of a corpse, rather than that of a living man.

With sunken eyes he scanned the astounded faces which were turned towards him, and then he slowly extended his hand towards Katherine. He spoke in a hollow and agitated voice :

“ Sister, I come to sue for pardon.”

She started from her stupor of amazement, and sprang to his side. She flung

her arms round his neck, uttering a wild cry of ecstasy.

“He lives! Oh, Father of Heaven be thanked for this miracle!”

She kissed his haggard cheeks and cried with joy, forgetting at the moment all the anguish she had endured on his account.

“Amen, amen,” muttered Nicol, clasping his brother’s hand fervently.

Richard Janfarie bowed his head over his weeping sister, in devout contrition for the wrong he had done her who was so ready to pardon him. The content of the three was too great for speech of any kind, and awhile they remained embracing, silent. Lamington regarded them with brightening eyes, full of satisfaction and of hope. But he was still too much astonished by this singular conclusion to his faithful follower’s confession to be able to form any definite conception of the probable result.

Richard Janfarie was the first to acknowledge the presence of Lamington; and raising his head he looked at him with an appealing expression.

"She has forgiven me," he said, speaking with some difficulty, "you will not refuse me pardon?"

"You have it, Janfarie, freely; but I am eager to know in what spirit we are to meet—as friends or foes?"

"As friends, if you will consent."

Lamington grasped his hand.

"The past is forgotten," he said, warmly; "from this moment I am your leal friend and kinsman."

"You will find me as true as I have been spiteful, Lamington. I am your grateful debtor as well as friend; and if I live, you shall not lack proof of it in the hour of your need. I owe you life: I will not pause to spend it in your service."

His strength seemed to fail him, and he sank on the seat which Muckle Will had hastily provided for him, Katherine supporting him on one side and Nicol on the other, whilst Gordon made a movement to render what assistance might be necessary.

“Thank you, Katherine, and thanks to you, Gordon,” said Janfarie, as if anxious to re-assure them; “this is nothing but the cursed weakness of my limbs—they have been sorely strained, yet I think I could have held myself more stoutly against your wrath than against your kindness—that conquers me.”

“Ah, brother,” said Katherine, tenderly, “you are more like yourself to-day with all your weakness than you have been since first you called Cochrane friend.”

Janfarie’s sunken eyes sparkled with rage at the name, and he spoke hastily :

“Ay, I must speak of him. You

marvel at the change of my humour towards you as much, I will be sworn, as you marvel at my appearance in life."

"We are as grateful to the means which have wrought the change as we are glad to welcome you among us," said Gordon, earnestly.

"A few words will let you understand it all. When in the Glenkens I forced you to the combat, blind and mad as I was in my fury, I saw that twenty times my life was at your mercy and you spared it, despite the provocation you received. Again, when by my own fury I stumbled into the pit and would have perished, you rescued me. I learned that from one of the fellows who were with me, and at the moment I hated you for it. I refused to let the men carry me to the place you had appointed, and we found shelter in a forester's hut. There I remained two days,

hanging on the brink of death, whilst one of the lads rode to Linlithgow to acquaint Cochrane with the mishap."

"But how came it to be reported that you were dead? I saw the messenger myself, and obtained the assurance from his own lips," said Nicol. "I would have gone there to see you interred, but Cochrane shamed me from it by bidding me think of avenging your fall rather than of wasting time in a journey to look on a dead man's face."

"It was his doing," answered Janfarie, bitterly; "it was one of his men you saw—a knave who was ready to swear to aught his master required. At the end of three days I was secretly conveyed to Cochrane's tower, and there fever seized me; for days—nay, weeks—I was insensible to all that passed around me; when I regained consciousness I was so weak,

that the leech and nurse who waited on me had to feed me like a babe. That was my condition for a while, and it was during this time that I first began to understand how much I had wronged you, Gordon, and what torture I had been causing Katherine to endure."

She pressed his hand pityingly, and he proceeded :

"The saints know that I desired her happiness ; but I believed that it would be best assured by the high position Cochrane pledged himself to give her, and by the advancement he promised to our house. Whilst I lay prostrate and helpless, I began to see how cowardly and knavishly I had been acting, and I began to feel, although slowly, that I was Gordon's debtor.

"Did you not see Cochrane?" queried Nicol.

“Ay, late one night he came to me. He told me of the report he had spread with the purpose of making Katherine herself revolt from all thought of union with Lamington. I refused to lend myself to further deception, and demanded that he would, without delay, declare the truth, that I lived, and that it was Gordon’s hand which had saved me. He tried at first to dissuade me, but finding that useless he promised to do my bidding if I would only remain quiet and get well.”

“He did not keep his promise,” interrupted Nicol.

“No ; he deceived me, as I believe now he would have done under any circumstances. He sent daily to inquire for my condition, and to assure me that all was going better than he had hoped, for Katherine was at length yielding to his suit. That did not pleasure me as it would

have done some weeks earlier; for I had become suspicious of his friendship. I still remained weak, although before his visit I had been recovering; and soon I began to fear that the leech was playing with my malady to keep me fast to the bed in order to serve his master's ends."

"What, would he have poisoned you?" ejaculated the brother, fiercely.

"No, I do not think that, for I was too useful to him; but he would have kept me prisoner there until my interference would have failed to serve any one. Tortured by my suspicions, I asked for one of my own lads to bear a message to Johnstone. I was answered that my followers had grown weary of waiting for me, and had taken their leave some days before. I have since learned that they had been persuaded to enter Cochrane's service, and that they had been removed by him, who doubtless feared

that they might be employed by me to contradict the report of my death."

"Oh, that I had been a man, and within arm's reach of the traitor!" exclaimed Katherine, her eyes flashing with indignation.

"When I learned that my men were gone, my suspicion of the treachery practised toward me was confirmed. Wrath quickened my enfeebled limbs. Whilst all believed me too helpless to stand alone, I rose from the bed and escaped from the place. I procured a horse from the stable: the warder had no instructions to bar my way, for the leech imagined that his art bound me to the sick chamber; and so I rode freely through the gates."

"Did they pursue?" said Nicol.

"I scarcely know. It is only three days since, and I have encountered none of them. I was resolved to find Lamington, and

journeyed toward the Glenkens. Accident brought me into contact with this brave fellow, Will, at a moment when my presence was of some service to him. The officer who accompanied him recognized me as a friend of his master, and was therefore willing to spare the man on my pledge that they should be speedily brought to Gordon's quarters. Will was soon satisfied of my intent, and he has brought me here to render you what reparation I may for the past."

"Take my hand as that of a brother," said Lamington, warmly; "and whatever ill you may have done me is more than requited."

Janfarie seized the hand eagerly, his eyes kindling with the fervour of his emotion.

"I read your meaning," he said; and then gently thrusting his sister forward; "Kate, he will make amends for all our cruelty."

The next instant she was clasped close to the breast of her lover; all the barriers which had so long parted them were trampled underfoot, and the ecstasy of that embrace repaid them for much of the suffering they had undergone.

Muckle Will had great difficulty in suppressing a shout of delight; and as the next best ventilation of his feelings he squatted on the floor, and hugged Stark with a vehemence which much surprised that sagacious animal.

“It’s a’ richt noo, Stark,” he whispered, “and you and me did it, as I ken’d we would. We’ll have a stoup o’ yull on the head o’t.”

The intense happiness of the party was suddenly interrupted by the sounds of a furious commotion in the camp. There was a wild confusion of voices, a clang of arms, a clatter of footsteps, and a trampling

of horses' hoofs as if a battle had begun. Presently the listeners were able to distinguish the cry of alarm.

“Treason — treason ! The King's in danger. Ho, there, to the rescue !”

Lamington instantly resigned Katherine to the care of Muckle Will and Richard Janfarie, who was too weak to join in the threatened conflict ; then snatching up his sword he hurried from the tent, followed by Nicol, who was now proud to acknowledge him as his leader and brother.





CHAPTER XIV.

THE FATE OF THE FAVOURITES.

“ Now they hae bound this traitor strang,
Wi’ curses and wi’ blows ;
And high in air they did him hang
To feed the carrion crows.”

Caerlaveroc.

THE arrest of Cochrane had been effected with sufficient secrecy to enable the barons to reach his Majesty’s pavilion in advance of any rumour of the event. Angus, Lord Gray, and the Lord Chancellor, Evandale, with several others, obtained an immediate audience of the King; and whilst they occupied him in debating sundry matters

of import, their followers made rapid search for their victims.

One of the least offenders, named Preston, and who was one of the only two of the favourites who could lay claim to gentlemanhood by birth, was the first to be seized. He submitted quietly, unable to believe that any serious harm was meditated towards him. The tailor, Hommel, was the next discovered, but he slipped through the fingers of his captors, and rushed forth, screaming at the pitch of his voice, "Treason!—treason! The King's in danger!" And it was this cry which was caught up by one voice after another until it had reached the limits of the camp, spreading confusion and alarm everywhere, and calling together all those loyal gentlemen, who, like Lamington, were prepared to serve their monarch at all hazards, whatever might be his faults.

But although he had succeeded in spreading the alarm, Hommel was promptly seized, gagged, bound hand and foot, and placed beside the others under a strong guard.

The King heard that cry, which was the most terrible of all sounds to his ears, and he turned pale as he scanned the faces of the nobles who surrounded him. Rendered desperate by his circumstances, he plucked his rapier from its scabbard, and broke through the midst of the barons, who were unprepared for the movement.

“Ha, my lords,” he said angrily, “if there be treason here, we must know the cause of it.”

He rushed out to the front of the pavilion, and the spectacle he witnessed there was enough to appal him. Instead of the royal guards, the ground was occupied by the men of Angus and his fellow-conspirators.

But most ominous of all, James saw his minions bound and prisoners, appealing to him for the protection which he was unable to give. Alarmed on his own account, he turned quickly to the barons who had followed him. He spoke with dignity, although his lips trembled :

“Stand back, sirs ; come none of you within reach of my weapon until this treachery is explained, else we will count him the declared foe of our royal person and use him in accordance. Speak you, my Lord Angus, who are the traitors here, and what is their purpose ?”

He was obeyed ; for this unexpected display of courage and dignity commanded respect. Angus responded gruffly, but respectfully :

“We are the liege subjects of your Majesty, ready to defend your person to the last extremity of our means and lives ;

but we are resolved that the false knaves who have so long given an evil bent to your thought and government, shall pay the penalty of their misdemeanours."

"And by whom has this judgment been pronounced?"

"By the full council, sire, and by the voice of the people who have groaned under the tyranny of your minions."

"The judgment is unlawful, my lord, and we refuse to sanction its execution."

"So much we expected from your Majesty, and we are prepared to execute it without your sanction."

"Traitors, then you forswear your allegiance?"

"No, sire," broke in Evandale; "but we are resolved to save your Majesty from the ruin to which your infatuation is hurrying you. Look round, my liege, there is not one of those gentlemen who has not suffered

at the hands of the knaves who have betrayed your confidence by turning it to their own base uses."

James looked round, and the glance satisfied him that he was powerless to alter the decision which had been declared. The bitterness of the moment was some atonement for the weakness, the misdirected kindness, and the obstinacy which had combined to bring him into this position. Whilst he remained in silent agony, reflecting how he was to proceed, a horseman galloped up to the place where his Majesty stood, drew rein by his side, and sprang from the saddle,

"Lamington!" exclaimed several voices, surprised by his sudden appearance and perplexed to divine his purpose.

"Mount, sire," said Gordon in an undertone, "but forego any thought of resisting their lordships; the whole camp is on their

side, for their movement is not against your Majesty, but against those whom all hate."

The King glanced quickly at the speaker and recognized the sincerity of his words. Accepting his proffered aid, he vaulted into the saddle. There was a movement amongst the barons as if they feared that this was some attempt to frustrate their object. The movement, however, was interrupted by a piercing shriek for mercy.

Immediately afterwards the King's page, John Ramsay, rushed from the pavilion in which he had been hiding. He was pursued hotly by a couple of troopers. The youth, searching wildly for some means of escape, observed the King, and with one desperate bound sprang on to the horse's back behind him, clasping his arms round his royal master's body, and crying piteously for mercy and protection.

The pursuers only halted within halberd length of his Majesty.

James bowed his head on his breast, humiliated by the circumstances which compelled him to become a suppliant where he should have commanded ; for, to save the youth, he must supplicate.

“ My liege, my liege—my dear master, save me from these men who seek to murder me,” cried Ramsay, as, at a signal from Angus, the troopers were about to drag him from the horse.

The King raised his hand, and the men paused.

“ My lords,” said the monarch, with faltering tone, “ you can spare me this one of your victims. Let his youth plead for him, if the voice of your King is too feeble to move you to pity or respect for me. What wrongs, what spite can be gratified by the death of one whose tender years prove him

unfit for any counsel or act that may have harmed you? Grant me this—I ask it as a boon.”

His voice became so husky with emotion that his concluding words were barely audible, although their purport was clearly understood.

The nobles displayed some hesitation, for they had determined on the extirpation of the whole nest of satellites; but the sorrowful spectacle of the humiliated King pleading to them for a boon had its influence in rousing the kindlier nature of the sternest; and this, aided by the advice of the Abbot Panther, who was now amongst them, prevailed.

“The boy may live, since your Majesty desires it,” said Angus; “and now we must pray you, sire, to ride forward to Edinburgh. Your Grace will be attended by a fitting escort, and we will follow as

soon as we have arranged with our Southron foes in the manner which may seem most to the advantage of the State."

James inclined his head gravely in acknowledgment of their lordships' concession, and then said, slowly :

"Are we to regard our position as that of a prisoner?"

"No, sire, only as that of one under restraint until the difficulties of the hour are settled," replied the earl; "and in proof of our sincerity you may select from us the chiefs of your escort."

"When the captive must select his gaoler from amongst his captors, he has little interest in the matter," said the King, bitterly. "Send with me whom you will."

His Majesty was conducted from the place, and shortly afterwards he was on his way to the Castle of Edinburgh, attended by about five hundred men and half a dozen

nobles. Lamington was appointed one of the royal escort, and the appointment afforded the unfortunate monarch some little satisfaction, for he had come to recognize the devotion of the man who had on a former occasion shown himself ready to surrender life in his service.

In the mean while the rest of the favourites were hastily secured; but when the roll of the victims was called there was one absent. The fat little master of fence, Torphichen, could nowhere be found, and the search for him was about to be renounced, when a large drum, which stood near the royal pavilion, was observed to give a sudden lurch in an unaccountable manner. The drum was quickly lifted from the ground, and there the fat little man was discovered, doubled up with his head bent towards his feet. He was ghastly with fright, suffocation, and cramp.

At the first sound of alarm he had ingeniously knocked the side out of the drum and hidden himself under it. There he had remained, listening to the cries of his comrades for mercy and the stern rejection of their appeal. Terror kept him motionless for a long time; at length the pain of his position drove him to make an effort to change it; but his stout person rendered the movement impossible without shifting his covering, and so he had been discovered.

He was sufficiently exhausted by the torture he had undergone to find relief in the fresh air and the freedom of his limbs, although the next moment he was to be led to his doom. The position in which he had been discovered excited a good deal of mirth, but he was indifferent to that, for the effect of his confinement had stupefied him.

Like a drove of cattle to the slaughter, they were all marched to the bridge of Lauder, where scaffolds had been hastily prepared for them. Remonstrances and prayers were unheeded. They were allowed a few minutes in which to implore the mercy of heaven, and that was all the clemency which their captors would grant.

Cochrane and Leonard were brought down from the kirk. The smith, whose tall, brawny frame bore many recent scars and wounds, walked with steady step, his swarthy face turned to those around him with an expression of fierce and sullen hate. But he spoke no word.

His companion in misfortune, however, walked with as jaunty a step as if he had been going to the bridal, for which his gay raiment would have been appropriate, instead of proceeding to his execution. On all sides he was mockingly saluted as the

Right Noble the Earl of Mar, and hooted at as the assassin of the bonnie prince whose title he had adopted. Again he was execrated as the inventor of the base placks, and as the evil genius of the King.

But all the contumely which was heaped upon him Cochrane acknowledged with a cool smile of irony, bowing to his vehement execrators with the courtesy of one who receives the grateful plaudits of an admiring populace. With this audacity he bore himself to the last.

He thanked his executioner when he observed that the scaffold intended for him was the central one of the row, and that it was raised about a foot higher than any of the others. Even in such a ghastly transaction as the present, he declared himself gratified by the admission of his superiority.

As a further distinction of his iniquity, a rope of hair had been procured to hang

him with ; and at this, too, he expressed himself pleased. He did not blanch even at the last moment, when the cord was round his neck. He looked scornfully down at the animated faces of the crowd of soldiers and burghers, and in a clear voice, he said :

“I have done the people of Scotland good service, and they repay me with a gallows. But the day comes when this deed will be my honour and the shame of your country.”

The denunciation was received in silence ; for his courage at this terrible moment had an imposing effect on the listeners, much as they detested him.

The executioners did their work, and in a few minutes afterwards there was a row of lifeless forms dangling in the air on Lauder bridge.

The words which Cochrane had once

spoken in jesting scorn were realized. Immediately after his death, one of the first measures of those in power was to recall the "Cochrane Placks."

The Scottish army marched to Haddington; but the contest which had been imminent was averted by the discretion of the Scottish nobles, seconded by the efforts of the person on whose account the English invasion was reputed to have been made. The Duke of Albany, with that impulsiveness which characterized his career and unfitted him for the pursuance of any steady course, became suddenly convinced that his claim to the throne would not be supported by the people. He therefore showed himself as ardently desirous of peace as he had been anxious for war.

Accompanied by Richard, Duke of Gloucester, Albany attended a meeting of

the council at Edinburgh to arrange the terms of a truce. The council refused to admit the right of Gloucester to have any say in the proceedings; but their lordships declared themselves ready to hear Albany, and desired to know his wishes.

“Then, in the first place,” he said, “I require the release of the King, my brother.”

“That shall be done,” replied the Earl of Angus, or Bell-the-Cat, as he was now universally called, “and the rather that you desire it. As for the person who is with you, we cannot admit his authority to demand anything from the council of Scotland. But in you we recognize the nearest heir to the throne, next to his Majesty’s son; and the King shall be freely delivered to you, in the hope that your friendship and counsel will enable him in future to govern the country to the satisfaction of the people, and to the content of

the nobles, so that we may never again have need to act contrary to his pleasure.”

According to the arrangements entered into, the English retained Berwick, but Gloucester and his army removed to the south.

James was set at liberty, and his reconciliation with his brother was so complete, that nothing would content him but that Albany should ride on the same horse with him from the castle down the Cannongate to Holyrood; and further he insisted that they should occupy the same bed-chamber. For some time this happy state of matters continued: the King was permitted to engage himself in the refined pursuits of painting, architecture, and music, and Albany administered the affairs of Government. All went satisfactorily until the duke's impulsive ambition took possession of him again, and he was compelled to fly

to England to the protection of his friend Gloucester, who had by that time become Richard III.

Whilst everything was at the height of well-being between the royal brothers, and their recent animosity seemed to be finally extinguished, there was a gallant bridal celebrated at Linlithgow. Sir Richard Janfarie, almost completely restored to health, with his brother Nicol, represented the family of the bride.

Of course the bride was Katherine, and Lamington the bridegroom. All question as to the former rites through which she had been dragged was removed by the death of Cochrane. The Abbot Panther performed the ceremony of marriage in the presence of the King, Queen, and the Duke of Albany. The latter discharged the pledge he had given to Gordon for aiding his escape from the castle: the escheated

estates of Lamington's father were restored to the son, and his Majesty, to mark his appreciation of him and the service he had done, presented him with letters patent creating him Viscount of Kenmore.

The Glenkens and the Rhinns of Gallo-way were ablaze with bonfires in honour of the bridal, and in welcome of the knight to his home again. The lady was the toast of the country round; and there was not a man or woman from Johnstone to Kenmore who did not rejoice in the union of the lady who had suffered so cruelly for her love, and of the knight who had proved himself faithful through all adversity.

Mysie Ross was removed from the unkindly guardianship of her uncle, and accompanied the Countess of Kenmore to her new home. Not a very long while after there was another wedding, not quite so grand, but quite as merry, and this time

the happy couple were Mysie and Muckle Will, whose goodness she accounted more than enough to outweigh his awkwardness. Stark was a little disconsolate at first ; but he soon came to devote himself to his mistress as faithfully as he had hitherto devoted himself to his master alone.

Richard and Nicol Janfarie maintained their place long as chiefs amongst the Border riders ; and from the date of the meeting in the tent at Lauder camp, they never regretted the flight of their sister from Johnstone.





EPILOGUE.

THE readers who have pursued the events of the story to this page may be interested in the following brief memoranda regarding the principal historical personages who have been presented to them.

The assassination of the Earl of Mar, and the assumption of his title by Cochrane; the attack on the King at Linlithgow; the escape of Albany; and the execution of the royal favourites, are historical events reproduced with little variation from the fact, save as regards the part played in them by Lamington.

James III. was, as he is represented here, a weak, kindly, and superstitious man; artistic in his tastes; unfitted for the time he lived in and for the position he occupied. His death, after the battle of Sauchieburn, forms a sad and tragic episode in history. His person, and that of Queen Margaret, are described principally from the portraits in Holyrood.

Robert Cochrane, the chief favourite, was educated at Padua, and was an architect by profession, but the nobles contemptuously dubbed him "the Mason." The character ascribed to him is that of tradition; Mr. Froude has made some attempt to show that he was a man of talent. It is scarcely necessary to say that his association with Katherine Janfarie is fictitious.

The introduction of the Abbot Panther is an anachronism. He belonged to the sixteenth century, and was busily employed

in affairs of state under the Regency which preceded the reign of Queen Mary, and continued to be so employed some time during her reign. The first throes of the Reformation were beginning to be felt when he was a youth ; he lived to see the Reformation effected, much to his dissatisfaction. He was gifted with a jovial spirit, and a shrewd, politic mind ; full of intrigue and enterprise, faithful to his friends and not unmerciful to his foes—in brief, an admirable example of the priest-politician.

THE END.

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